METAL HAMMER

SPOOKY SEASON Special

TAKING OVER THE WORLD...
ONE TAINT AT A TIME

Ghost

FUTURE
ISSUE 380

TRIVIUM
WE GET SLOPPED IN THE PIG PEN

SABATON
INSIDE THEIR BLOCKBUSTER WAR MOVIE

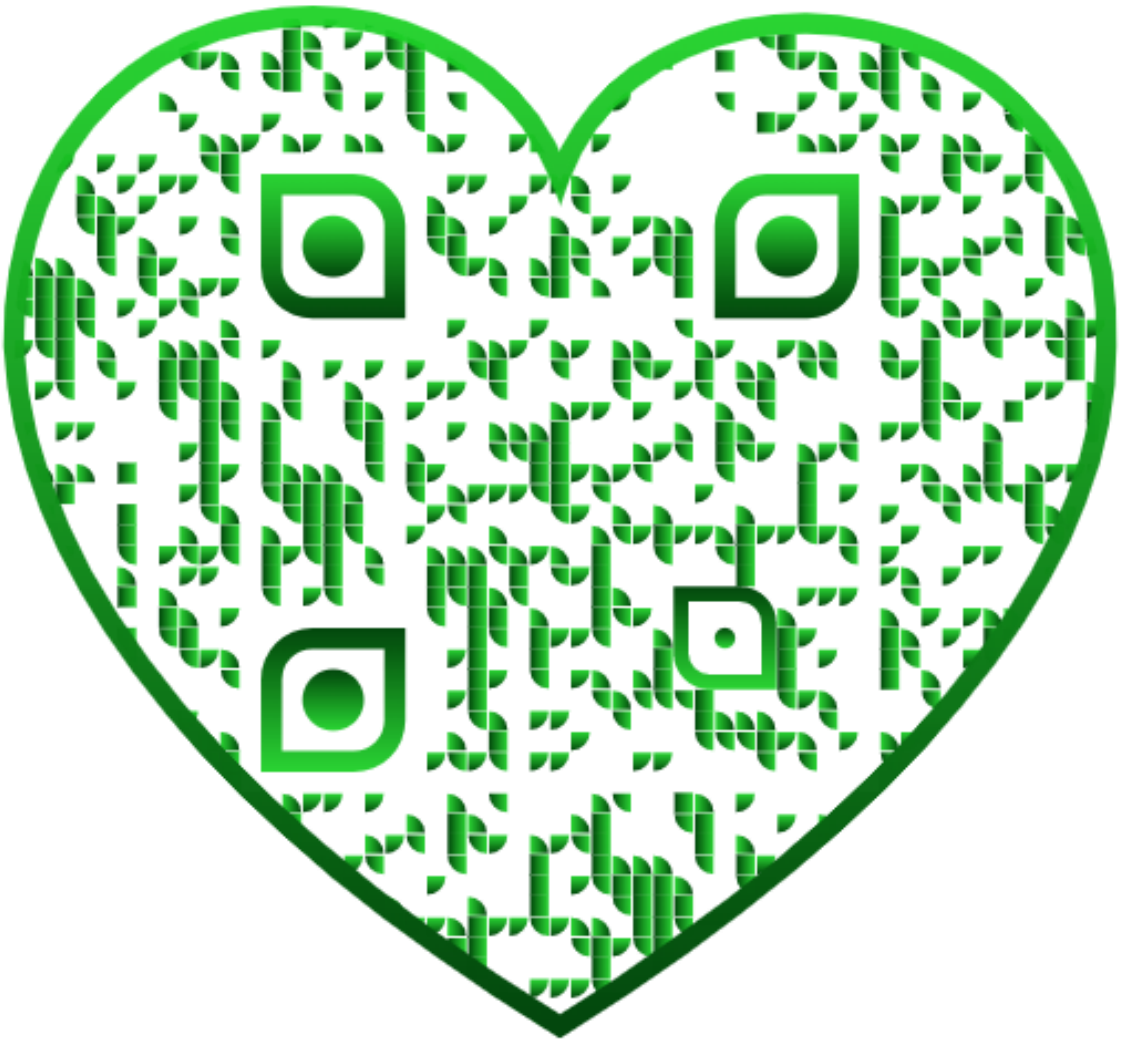
DAVE LOMBARDO
ON SLAYER, THRASH RIVALRY, AND HIS LOVE FOR LARS

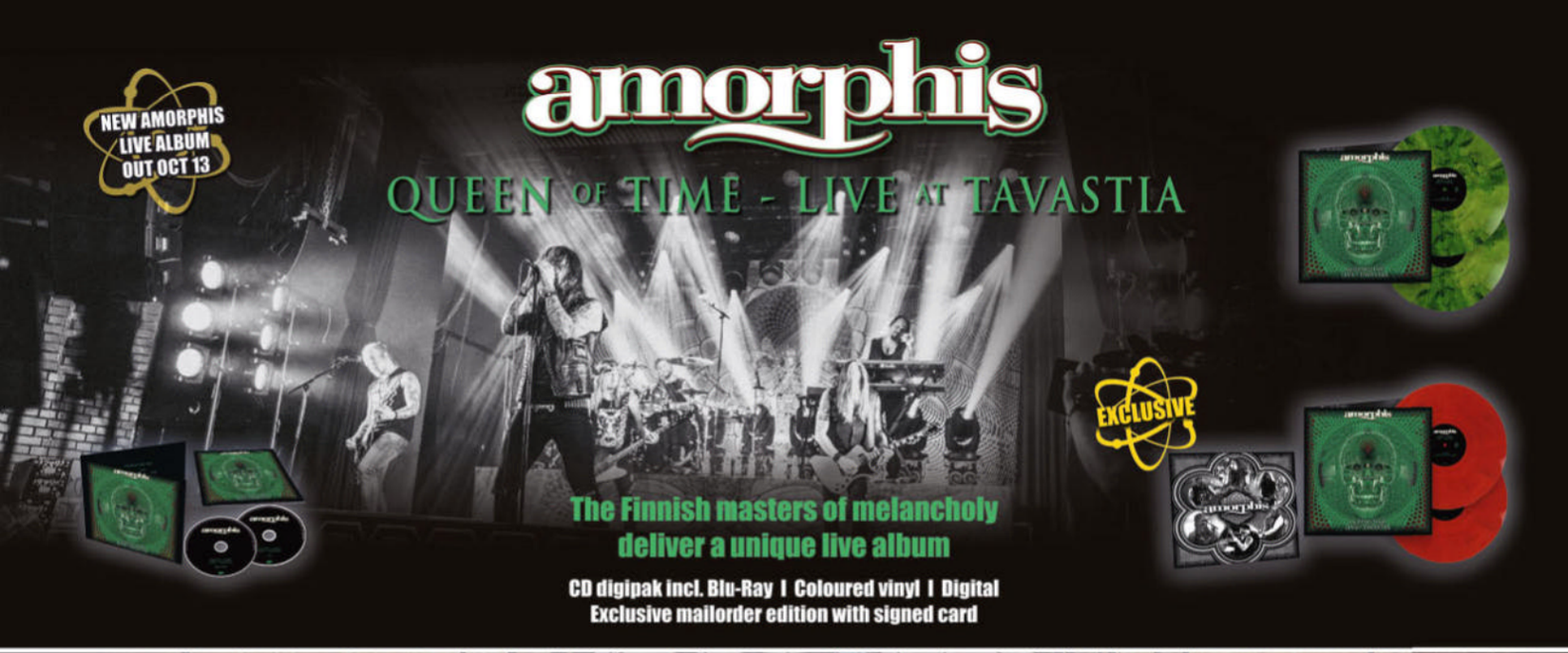
+

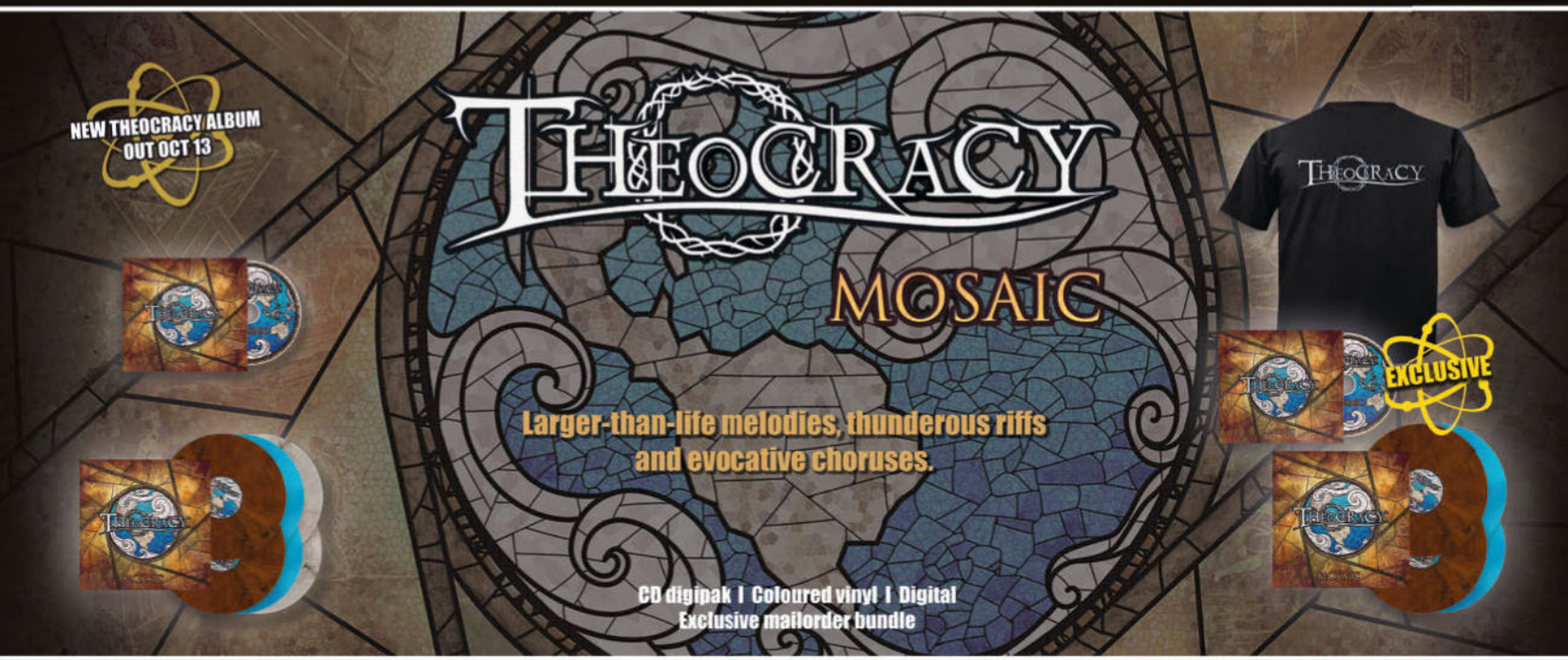
TWIN TEMPLE
AT HOME WITH YOUR FRIENDLY NEIGHBOURHOOD SATANISTS

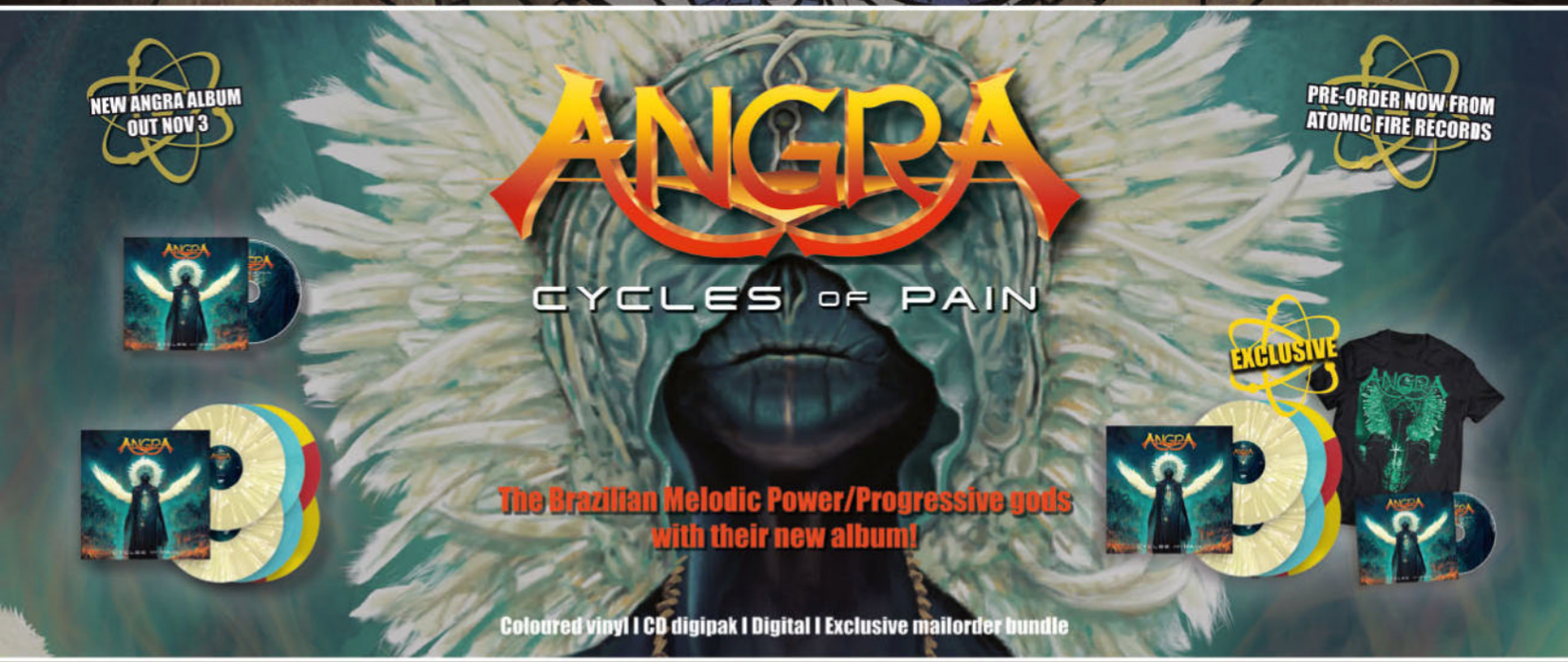
CREEPER
VAMPIRES! GHOSTS! MEAT LOAF WORSHIP!

SVALBARD • JESSICA PIMENTEL • DORO • WHILE SHE SLEEPS • THE USED • BETTER LOVERS +









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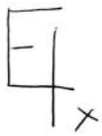
TRICK OR TREAT!

THIRTEEN YEARS AGO, a little band called Ghost came to London. Wearing scary masks, singing about dead human sacrifices and wearing long clerical robes, few could have guessed they'd take over the world. But here we are. Now five albums deep, our Dave Everley flew to LA for a special pair of shows at the Forum, where the audience were mysteriously asked to lock away their phones at the door. Afterwards, he caught up with Papa/Tobias to uncover the secrets of that night and how the band have found such incredible success.

Oh! And you might have noticed there are *two* covers to collect this issue. Papa looking resplendent in his gold suit, and Papa as an *actual ghost* in a sheet – with Spooky Season in full swing, we just couldn't resist. And as a special Treat, we've also included a poster of both papal looks (we're calling it a 'ghoster'). Elsewhere, we pay a visit to Twin Temple's gothic home to look at their skull and taxidermy collections, and get the inside story of Creeper's brilliantly imaginative vampire rock opera. It's the most wonderful time of the year!

Stay spooky,



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MEET THE BAND

EMILY SWINGLE
WRITER
"Write for *Hammer*," they said. "It'll be fun," they said. That's before we sent Emily to Thorpe Park to get catapulted in the air for our Svalbard feature. What a good sport.

TRAVIS SHINN
PHOTOGRAPHER
Travis larked about with skulls at Twin Temple's house before driving for 12 whole hours to shoot Ghost, and still delivered amazing images. Travis, you're a legend and we salute you.

DAVE EVERLEY
WRITER
After interviewing Tobias Forge, Dave stayed in the States and is currently visiting Roswell, infamous site of alien conspiracy theories. Be careful, Dave! The truth is out there, etc. etc.

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THE BIG PICTURE

WINDHAM 'BRAY WYATT' ROTUNDA 1987-2023

ON THURSDAY AUGUST 24, the wrestling world was rocked by the news that Windham Rotunda, known by his WWE moniker Bray Wyatt, had unexpectedly died at the age of just 36. Beloved by fans for his captivating promos and unique wrestling style, and particularly embraced by metalheads for his horror-influenced gimmick and darkly subversive aesthetic, Bray enjoyed almost a decade as one of WWE's most memorable on-screen characters, winning three world championships during his time with the company.

A huge metal fan, Bray once reached out to Slipknot with a request to use their 2019 single *Unsainted* as his official entrance theme, tweeting: "I'm trying to convince Corey Taylor to let me use this as the best entrance music of all time." He was also a fan of Code Orange; during his run as a terrifying masked monster nicknamed The Fiend, Bray's theme was provided by the Pittsburgh metallers. Paying tribute to Bray on social media following his death, the band stated: "Rest In Power brother. Thank you so much for making our dreams come true. We love you and will see you on the other side."

Following Bray's death, WWE revealed that all proceeds from the sales of his merchandise would go towards supporting his family.

SHUTTERSTOCK

THE HOT TOPIC

SABATON GO TO THE MOVIES

The Swedes are bringing the stories behind their epic *The War To End All Wars* album to the big screen – and helping out some historic institutions in the process

WORDS: CHRIS CHANTLER

Sabaton: an ideas powerhouse!

A SABATON MOVIE is coming to a museum near you. Appropriately set to premiere on Remembrance Day – November 11 – and showing at museums across mainland Europe and the UK, *The War To End All Wars – The Movie* is based on last year's album of the same name. Scripted, directed and overseen by the Swedish power metallers' co-founding bassist/mastermind Pär Sundström, in collaboration with Yarnhub Studios, the animated feature depicts the stories behind those 11 stirring songs of WWI heroism. To screen the movie, Pär had the brainwave of reaching out to various military history museums, offering them the film for free, as part of Sabaton's 'History Rocks' project.

"I'm happy if we can bring people back to museums they haven't been to for a long time," explains the bassist, on a Zoom call from a swanky hotel lobby in Cologne, "but I'm even more happy if we make people who've never been to a museum go for the first time. That's the purpose of the whole project. I wasn't really excited about the idea of bringing it to cinemas – that could have been an option, but too much hassle and too expensive. I wanted to do it with museums, and donate any income to them. We've been to plenty of museums over the years, and the one thing they have in common is they're all lacking funds, and they're all struggling to find a new audience. So maybe this could help."

"THE MUSEUMS ARE WONDERING IF WE'VE LOST OUR MINDS!"
PÄR SUNDSTRÖM

It's not the first time Sabaton have stepped up to aid the preservation of history. In 2019 they rallied behind the Heugh Battery Museum in Hartlepool, facing closure due to lack of funds; a t-shirt campaign helped it stay open. Guided by philanthropic zeal for the flourishing of these spaces, the project has been positively received.

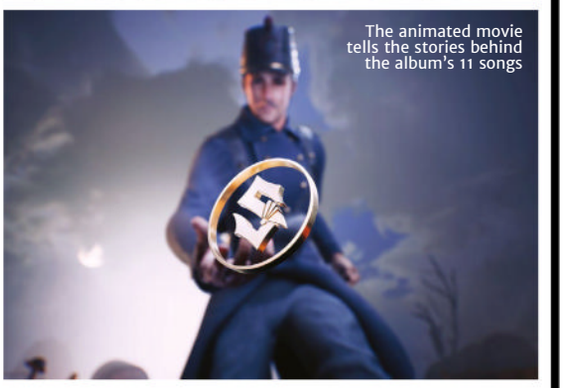
"The response we've had so far from museums has been amazing, they're very excited," says Pär, "and they're wondering if we've lost our minds, giving away any profit from it! But we have got a lot out of museums, and this is our chance to give something back. We give all freedom to the museum to decide how they do it. Whether they have a small TV or a 4K big screen with surround system, they can do as they want. It's not the main purpose to have a fantastic cinema experience, the purpose is for fans to connect with history, and for museums to find a new audience. We know our fans are interested in history, so hopefully they will be interested in their local museum as well. It's a symbiotic project."

So was the film always part of the plan with this album, to tell these stories in more depth?

"It started to come about during the writing of the album, but we couldn't work on a script until we had all the songs," says Pär. "It was a lot of work, there's about 800 scenes, and it was hard to find a correct timeline that binds together the music and the stories, but I really enjoyed it. I was involved in every little part, the sound effects and all the detailed stuff. It was very time consuming – we needed a waiver for PRS [the Performing Right Society], that took six months – but very exciting to do something outside of what I ordinarily do."

Surveying the list of screening venues should bring a frisson of joy to history buffs. Fans are encouraged to get in touch with more suggestions,

PRESS



The animated movie tells the stories behind the album's 11 songs

prompting fond recollections of family Bank Holidays spent investigating wartime hardware. For example, surely Portsmouth's Explosion Museum of Naval Firepower is a shoo-in?

"Oh, that's a great name – I'd assume that's on our list! But there's a chance they haven't yet seen it. Sometimes our email ends up in museums' spam folders, unfortunately. It's why we're encouraging fans to ask museums on our behalf, to say, 'Hey there's this thing you can do, it won't cost you anything, we'll all come to pay you money, see this movie and help you guys.'"

One concern remains: the whole project around *The War To End All Wars* is of such epic magnitude, how do Sabaton follow 'the album to end all albums'? Pär chuckles, but his reply radiates the confidence you'd expect of a band who fought their way to the top the old-fashioned way, through sheer graft, conviction and gut instinct.

"Yes, sure, the tour broke all our expectations, it was massive, the whole cycle was super. It ends in November with this movie, now Sabaton will go somewhere else in history. We're working very hard on new music, we are all in good spirits, we have very interesting topics for a new album, and plenty of material. Next year is our 25th anniversary, we've been planning this for a while. We'll shine a light on our entire catalogue and bring back a lot of lost treasures! I have a very strong belief in Sabaton for the future."

***HISTORY ROCKS* PREMIERES ON NOVEMBER 11 AT MUSEUMS ACROSS MAINLAND EUROPE AND THE UK. FOR THE FULL LIST, SEE MOVIE.SABATON.NET**

COREY TAYLOR: PRESS/PAMELA LITTKY

10 THINGS WE LEARNED THIS MONTH

What's been blowing our tiny brains

COREY TAYLOR ACTUALLY DIGS *ST. ANGER*

"Now when I listen to it, I think a lot of the stuff's really good," says the Slipknot frontman. Fair enough!

DAVID DRAIMAN WANTS TO COLLAB WITH TAY-TAY

The Disturbed singer is a big fan of Taylor Swift, tweeting: "I'd love to collaborate with Taylor if she ever wanted to."

A GRUNGE ROCK OPERA IS COMING

Pearl Jam guitarist Mike McCready revealed that he's working on a script alongside 18 songs.

It seems Corey is a fan of Metallica's most divisive album

MICHAEL BUBLÉ FRONTS FOO FIGHTERS NOW

OK, so it was only briefly for a cameo at a recent Foos show, but still, what a trip!

AI IS GETTING WAY OUT OF CONTROL

How many more 'famous frontman sings classic metal anthem by totally different band' monstrosities can we take?! Loads, apparently.

IT'S OFFICIALLY SPOOKY SEASON!

For some of us it's *always* spooky season, but still, got your pumpkins ready?

NICKELBACK ARE DONE TALKING ABOUT PEOPLE HATING THEM

Frontman Chad Kroeger says that new documentary *Hate To Love: Nickelback* will be the final word on the subject.

DANNY WORSNOP BACKS BACKING TRACKS

"It allows you to play so much more," the Asking Alexandria frontman argues. NB: No, he's not talking about miming being good.

BRIXTON ACADEMY IS REOPENING

Closed since December last year, Brixton will be running 'test events' in the coming months to prove it can meet suitable safety conditions. Awesome news.

BOY GEORGE LOVES NAPALM DEATH

The Culture Club vocalist went to see ND in Australia, tweeting his "ears are still ringing". Collab when?

WHO WILL BE THE NEXT METAL QUEEN?

Doro Pesch answers your questions on singing for Motörhead, curries with Dio, and who might one day wear her crown

WORDS: CHRIS CHANTLER

SINCE DEBUTING WITH Düsseldorf legends Warlock in 1984, Doro Pesch has been the undisputed Metal Queen. She's back again this month with her 14th solo album, the uplifting and tempestuous *Conqueress – Forever Strong And Proud*. She's also just about the loveliest person on the planet, with enough positive energy to make Dave Grohl look like Eeyore, so it was high time we threw her your perceptive questions – well, perceptive except for the one about the duck/horse thing. That one's just barmy.

Who are your musical heroes?
John Felix, Facebook
"That's easy to answer! When I was a little girl, I was into glam rock – T. Rex, Sweet, Slade, Suzi Quatro, Alice Cooper – then when I had my first band, my heroes were Ronnie James Dio, David Coverdale, Rob Halford, Lemmy, Biff Byford, and all of the NWOBHM bands. Of course I loved Girlschool and Rock Goddess – [vocalist] Jody Turner was my favourite singer!"

You've influenced countless power metal bands over the years. What recent bands from the subgenre excite you right now?
James Allen, Facebook
"I like Powerwolf, but they're not so young anymore! The ladies of Burning Witches are doing a great job, too. Of the heavier bands I like Nervosa, an all-girl band from Brazil. There are so many great new bands, many are doing the 80s metal stuff, they dress and sound just like the 80s, which I like so much!"

Who's well positioned to one day take the crown as Metal Queen?
Jo Fleischer, Twitter/X
"There are many great females! I like Alissa of Arch Enemy, Floor Jansen, Lzzy Hale, Simone of Epica, Cristina of Lacuna Coil… there are so many phenomenal ladies and great singers, all in their own vein of heavy metal."

What keeps you ahead of the game?
QueenCH6666, Twitter/X
"The love for the fans is, for me, the most important thing. Whether it's a small club or a big festival, I always find motivation and inspiration when I hop onstage and see all those happy faces lining up. I can overcome any difficult situations; I can jump 10 times higher because of the fans! And I love the music, I love metal, so these two things always make me want to power on and do more stuff."

Is it true you live in New York now? Where would you recommend going?
Angela Beatty, email
"I still have a little place in New York, but when the World Trade Center was attacked, I moved from Manhattan to Long Island. I thought that would be safe, but then we had Hurricane Irene, and those houses are like cardboard, so that was destroyed. We tried to rebuild, but the next year Hurricane Sandy came and totalled everything again! But I still have a nice place in NY. I recommend the Village [NYC slang for Greenwich Village], they have tons of clubs and pubs and places to hear cool new music. Also Sixth Street, where they have 100 Indian restaurants – Ronnie James Dio always loved Indian food, so when we were touring together, we always ate on Sixth Street."

If you could have any superpower, what would it be?
Em Willis, email
"World peace! I would try to solve every problem and bring peace to the world, that's the most important thing in this day and age. It would take a lot to do, but I hope I'd be a good peacemaker!"

Would you sing for Motörhead if they did a Lemmy tribute show?
Scott Kelloway, Facebook
"Yes, of course, no question! We did a Lemmy special at Wacken recently with Phil Campbell and Mikkey Dee. I did *Love Me Forever* – that was my first duet with Lemmy [on 2000's *Calling The Wild* LP]. Also we did *Ace Of Spades* with all the guests and there was a big drone show, so we had Lemmy's face in the sky smoking a cigarette. There was even a puff of smoke, it was awesome!"

Have you ever had a near-death experience?
Grimsby Pilchard, email
"Many times, as a child and as an adult. I have many guardian angels, I tell you! One Christmas I was driving a nice

PRESS

The Metal Queen isn't so lonely these days

"IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO DO A NEW WARLOCK ALBUM, BUT NOT IMPOSSIBLE"

We can't help wondering if there's a cockroach in her hand...

old BMW on the highway, I was really speeding, and a tyre blew. The car spun around and crashed into something, it all happened in slow motion. I thought, 'This is it…' but I felt like someone, or something, was present. Then the car came to a stop and these nice people carried me out. The car was totalled, I had to cancel the tour, but I was alive! I wouldn't be here if there wasn't a heavenly superpower saving my life."

Were you more influenced by early German rock and metal, or music from outside the country?
Chirag Toila, Facebook
"It was mainly music from England. England was the best! The NWOBHM was super-influential. There was just one German band I liked so much: Accept. I saw them supporting Judas Priest in 1980 – back then I didn't even know Scorpions were from Germany, it was much later I found out!"

Will Warlock ever reform and do a new album?
Brandon Koncyk, Facebook
"I only have contact with two Warlock members: Tommy [Bolan, guitar] will come and play ProgPower with us in Atlanta and Michael [Eurich, drums] will come to our Düsseldorf show, the big 40th anniversary in my old hometown. We're still great friends. But some of the Warlock guys gave up music altogether, I don't know where they are, so it would be very difficult to do a new album – but not impossible, as long as people are alive!"

What other metal genres would you like to explore?
Christian Hernandez, Facebook
"To me, metal was always the freedom to do whatever you think and feel. Metal is the ultimate – from super-heavy stuff to soulful ballads. I'm completely happy with the whole metal spectrum. I'm a big fan of some New York and Boston hardcore bands, so maybe I could check that out more!"

What do you see as being the biggest changes in being a woman in metal in the 80s to now?
James Brady, Facebook
"It's not so lonely! It's great that there are so many ladies doing it now – in the 80s there was only a handful. For example, when we played the legendary Monsters Of Rock festival at Castle Donington I had some stage clothes, and nobody could help me into them! I asked my drummer in the end, but there were no women there, not even backstage, so it's much better balanced. I'm not so lonely now, there are other girls to talk with and exchange tips and tricks on how to survive a tour!"

Have you ever met Sabina Classen from Holy Moses?
I Mladen Panic, Facebook
"She was just onstage with us when we did Wacken a few days ago! She sang with me on *All We Are*. We've done many things, we've always stuck together, it's always been positive, good vibrations. It was the same with all the metal ladies in the 80s – there was no rivalry whatsoever, there was always a great connection, great friendship, we always supported each other. It was always great to tour together. I love them all!"

Were you mad about having to go on before parody band Bad News at Donington '86?
Sally Friedman, email
"Ah, yeah, we didn't know them, we thought it was a little weird! I'm never mad, I'm always grateful, but we did a killer show, and the fans were so great to us we were able to hop on tour with Judas Priest a couple of weeks later. I know it was like a fun band, it made people laugh, but for us we thought we'd like to be a bit higher on the bill! But you have to deal with what you've got and make the best of it, which we did. Also I met Lemmy backstage after our set and he gave me a little kiss on my head. Maybe if we'd played later, I wouldn't have bumped into him?"

Would you rather fight 100 duck-sized horses or one horse-sized duck?
James McKernan, Facebook
"That's so funny, but I would not fight with any kind of animal – I'll even try to put a cockroach outside, so I don't step on it! [New song] *Heavenly Creatures* is dedicated to animals – I love animals so much, every animal deserves respect. It's the only thing I miss in my life, not having pets, but it's impossible with touring. So no, no fighting!"

How does it feel to have inspired so many women to become musicians?
Vicky R, email
"I hear that many times from bands with female members – the singer from Nervosa recently said her favourite album was [Warlock's 1987 album] *Triumph And Agony*. It's so great to hear. Whenever you do something and it inspires something positive, it's super-super!" MH

"I MET LEMMY BACKSTAGE AND HE GAVE ME A KISS ON MY HEAD"

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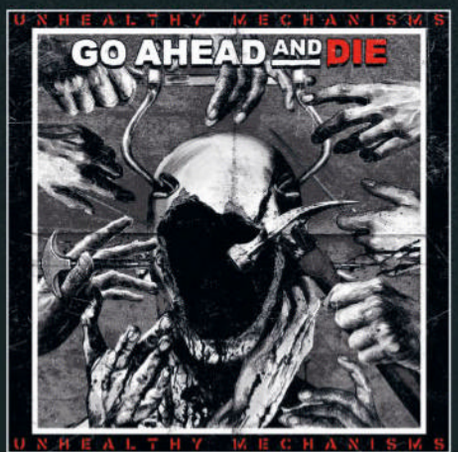

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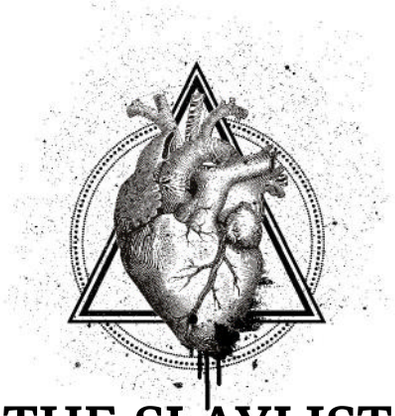


THE SLAYLIST

OL DRAKE

Thrash, more thrash and, erm, classic prog make up the healthy music listening habits of Evile's vocalist and long-time shredder

WORDS: WILL MARSHALL • PICTURES: STEVE DUTTON

From Gentle Giant to Cannibal Corpse, Ol likes to keep it varied!

"I FIRST HEARD SEPULTURA's *Desperate Cry* when I was getting into the more extreme side of metal. The middle section of this song has a guitar harmony part and I had an epiphany: 'Oh my God, I want to be able to do whatever just happened'! It was really impressive to me how they injected death metal into thrash, it's a really unique blend only Sepultura do. *Blackened* by **METALLICA** was it for me in high school. I couldn't stop listening to *...And Justice For All*; *Blackened* sums up everything I love about them. Someone I knew who hated metal used to shout at me and mock me. He'd shout the line *'fire to begin whipping dance of the dead.'* He thought it was an insult because people are fucking stupid, but it was the soundtrack to my school years.

"Jeff Waters from **ANNIHILATOR** is one of the most underrated guitarists and songwriters in metal. I remember hearing *Never, Neverland* and something about his solos… *Imperiled Eyes* was so technical it just baffled me, so it became a challenge, I had to learn it. I spent a good six to eight years learning their back catalogue after that. Obviously **SLAYER** have their epic popular tracks, but there's just something about *Necrophobic*. If I'm driving, I have to calm myself down! The production is so raw, it's so heavy and aggressive, it's everything I want to hear from thrash and it's just perfect."

"I didn't like death metal at first. I'd heard a Carcass album and the snare was going [imitates blastbeat], and I thought, that's not a beat, you can't do that. But **CANNIBAL CORPSE** was one of my first ever gigs at Rios in Bradford, and they played *Hammer Smashed Face*. I've seen loads of moshpits but as soon as that song kicked in, I've never seen anything like it to this day. It's one of the most insane pits and responses I've seen to a song."

"*Cemetery Gates* is beyond classic, and it has extra-special meaning for me and for us as a band. We covered it for a *Metal Hammer* Dimebag tribute issue [MHR200]; our bassist Mike [Alexander] didn't want to do it because hearing it upset him after Dimebag passed away. But us being the arseholes we are, said, 'We're doing it anyway', and Mike was really happy we did. Unfortunately it's the last thing we did with Mike before he passed away. When I went to see **PANTERA** recently they did a video montage of Dimebag and Vinnie with that song on. It floored me – I couldn't speak or do anything at all.

"**TESTAMENT**'s *Practice What You Preach* is another song whose solo I was obsessed with. When I was young, I was obsessed with Alex Skolnick – so much so that I got in touch with him. I was that fanboy that wouldn't leave him alone, but to his credit, he was always so nice and humble about it. He never acted like, 'Oh, go away,' and I always looked up to that. Thinking about songs that influenced me, a lot came from what my dad brought me up listening to, from Led Zeppelin and Deep Purple to King Crimson. At first I didn't understand it, but I remember hearing *Knots* by **GENTLE GIANT**, and I showed it to [producer] Russ Russell, and he said, 'Shane [Embury, Napalm Death] showed me this last week!'

"I love **YES**. They can do short, snappy songs or huge, long songs like *Close To The Edge*. It takes you into a world and on a journey through different feelings. There's a part in the song where it goes through a whole epic movement, and when you come out the other side it feels like you've come through a forest, and you're like, 'What just happened?!' *Chord Change* by **CAMEL** is one of the first prog songs I ever learned, and Andy Latimer is one of my favourite guitarists. I remember speaking to Mikael Åkerfeldt from Opeth and asking where he got Andy Latimer's hands from. He said, 'You got me, Opeth are a Camel rip-off' and to keep it quiet! Ha ha!"

LISTEN NOW
To hear Ol's choices, head to tinyurl.com/OlDrakeSlaylist

"EVILE'S COVER OF *CEMETERY GATES* FOR *METAL HAMMER* WAS THE LAST THING WE DID BEFORE MIKE PASSED AWAY"

***THE UNKNOWN* IS OUT NOW VIA NAPALM. EVILE'S UK TOUR STARTS IN BRIGHTON ON OCTOBER 13**

PRESS/STEVE DUTTON

IN THE STUDIO

WHILE SHE SLEEPS

Sheffield's finest get ready to push their own sonic envelope once more

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

Now Sleeps have ditched their imposter syndrome, expect more fun!

IT'S BEEN A long but steady climb for Sheffield metalcore crew While She Sleeps. Hotly tipped as metal's bright new hopes when they emerged just over a decade ago, they've taken the longer, arguably more interesting, route to the top. With every record they put out being greeted with greater and greater acclaim by fans and critics, and having sold out a venue as prestigious as Alexandra Palace in London, their forthcoming sixth album could be the one that finally places them atop metal's mountain. We caught up with vocalist Loz Taylor and guitarist Sean Long to ask what they've got cooking.

You've taken big leaps in your sound over the last few albums, by including rapping, choirs and electronics. Will this one see similar experimentation?
Loz Taylor: "I think so. We never like to conform to one sound; we want to push ourselves, maybe to the point we feel a bit scared and uncomfortable."

In February, you announced you were working on a new album by Tweeting 'Everything will change'…
Sean Long: "We were trying to manifest something. We were quite deep into the recording process. We knew how different it already sounded, so we wanted to put out into the universe that things are going to change. I like doing that; you put it down on paper and things have to change, a bit like how we put Ally Pally on sale – in some regard we weren't quite ready for it, but you make that statement, and it happens."

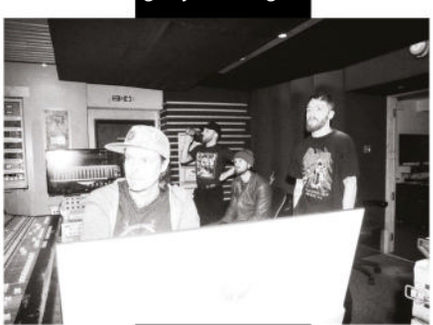
THE FACTS

ALBUM: 6

STUDIO: Six Audio, Sheffield

PRODUCER: Carl Bown and While She Sleeps

EXPECT: Loads of riffs, massive, chant-along hooks, and electronic, pop and ambient experiments cranked up to giddy new heights



On 2019's *So What*, you guys were pulling from classic Ministry Of Sound tunes. That was already pretty bold!
Sean: "Music has a lot of nostalgic power, and people are drawn to things that they grew up with. Metal has a lot of restrictions, but those restrictions get knocked down a lot as you get older. I'm influenced by a lot of old club music, so it's going to find its way through."

Six albums in, it must be hard to make compelling music if you're drawing from the same influences…
Loz: "Definitely. I've exhausted my inspiration from heavy music. I like to listen to things that have nothing to do with what we're making. People are going to hear that we don't give a fuck at all this time."
Sean: "We keep listening back to it and going 'How the fuck did this happen?' It's a crazy type of music, but it is what it is. If people don't like it, tough shit, we're not fucking around trying to please anyone anymore."

You're recording in your own studio again. How's that working out?
Sean: "Yeah, good. Us and our producer, Carl Bown, have a really good relationship; he knows that sometimes I can go into the studio when he isn't around and just mess about with stuff, delete tracks, add guitar parts… but credit to him, he doesn't mind, and it's good for us because we can sit on a song and make sure we get it right."

Sean, you've kind of been the architect of all the WSS albums. Have you used the other guys in the band more this time around?
Sean: "Yeah, I hold on pretty tight with each record, but this has been much more of a collaborative effort. So many more different treasures that are in all of us. Loz has brought a lot more to this album, much more light."

Lighter in what sense?
Loz: "For a long time there was a sense of imposter syndrome with us, but now we know we're a force to be reckoned with in the UK scene, so there's less pressure. We've always tackled heavy subjects, but this time everything is just a bit more… *fun*. We're in a good place and so the music isn't so dark… we're not afraid to show that side to us where we're actually enjoying being in a band and being onstage." H

THE NEW WHILE SHE SLEEPS ALBUM IS DUE EARLY NEXT YEAR VIA SLEEPS BROTHERS

PRESS

LIFE LESSONS

DJAMILA AZZOUZ

Ithaca's unyielding vocal powerhouse weighs in on representation, forgiving yourself and the time she was caught in a hostage situation

WORDS: RICH HOBSON • PICTURES: WILL IRELAND

THE FIREBRAND VOCALIST of Ithaca, Djamila Azzouz has a reputation for being outspoken and uncompromising, not only fronting one of the best metalcore bands of the last decade, but helping to spearhead a new vanguard of exciting young British bands. Having moved on from the self-loathing of 2019's *The Language Of Injury* to a more furious, empowering perspective on 2022's *They Fear Us*, we figured it was high time to sit down with Djamila and find out what makes her tick.

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

"I grew up in Holloway, North London. I'm quite protective of where I'm from, so I'm always reluctant to slag it off. It's one of those things where I'm allowed to bully my siblings, but you're not, right? But it was pretty rough, very inner-city London and quite deprived with working class families… all the good stuff."

THE GRASS ISN'T ALWAYS GREENER ON THE OTHER SIDE

"My parents didn't want me to go to a shit school, so I was sent to school in Barnet, which is pretty posh. But that meant I was a poor kid in a rich place, which was pretty hellish at times. I got bullied mercilessly. It wasn't like I was Oliver Twist, the only poor kid in school, but it's interesting thinking about the two places I spent most of my time growing up, and just how different they were. I'd spend all day around these well-off people, then it was like back to the sewer… but thankfully I love the sewer, because I'm basically five feral rats in a trench coat masquerading as a woman!"

STAND YOUR GROUND

"I'm a middle child and have two brothers, so we used to beat the shit out of each other. That meant I had no fear defending myself. These days I'm a very non-violent person, but coming from where I did meant you had to grow up quickly and if someone fucked with me, I'd fuck with them."

YOU WON'T ALWAYS FIT IN

"My entire life has been this dichotomy; I grew up with one really strict parent, because my dad is from Algeria and is a Muslim, and one very relaxed parent, because my mum's from East London. It was difficult and confusing at times. I was struggling with all these different aspects of my identity and these things my family were trying to enforce."

REPRESENTATION MATTERS

"I didn't have many idols growing up, because there weren't many people like me doing this. There were a couple of vocalists who I really loved, like I loved Kittie and a lot of Jack Off Jill, a lot of the Riot Grrrl stuff. So if anyone looks to me in that way now, I take it as a huge compliment. I don't even think you need to say something different: it's the act of visibility and being there, demanding a space at the table. That can make all the difference."

ASSERT YOURSELF

"When I met the other guys in Ithaca, I was maybe 19 and had an audition which was basically just a band practice. I was so worried about what people might think that I didn't tell anyone I was going to this lock-up in South London in December, which I'll say now is a terrible idea! My boyfriend at the time was also in a hardcore band, so I'd spent a long time just being his girlfriend and didn't want that to be a thing so much that I didn't even tell him I was going. I wanted to be taken seriously. The first time I met the guys, it just clicked instantly and it was like I'd found my voice."

"I'M JUST FIVE FERAL RATS IN A TRENCH COAT MASQUERADING AS A WOMAN"

IMITATION IS THE SINCEREST FORM OF FLATTERY

"For my audition, the guys played a song they'd written and asked me to ad-lib over it, so I just screamed a bunch of stuff. Later, they were like, 'Wow, that was really cool, it sounded so intense – what were the lyrics?' and I'd basically just sung *Break Stuff*!"

YOU'RE MORE THAN WHO YOU KNOW (OR WHO YOU'RE WITH)

"If you're from London or a major city, you will have a slight privilege just by proxy of being in the vicinity of people. I was very involved in music growing up – I had lots of friends who were in the industry or in bands, but when Ithaca started I was so nervous about things I wouldn't let anyone help me. I wouldn't play shows with my boyfriend's band; I wouldn't record with the same person they used because I didn't want to be known as his girlfriend and have people say, 'Oh she got this gig because they're dating.' I had to sever the notion of nepotism completely."

WHEN THE FUN STOPS, THE MUSIC STOPS

"Our approach as a band, our philosophy, has stayed the same since day one. We've only ever done it for the love of writing music. This band ends when we stop being friends – we're here to write music we like. Getting older, we put less pressure on ourselves because even though we're still very much 100% committed, things feel less like they're on fire."

NEVER STOP WANTING MORE

"I don't know if I'll ever feel like Ithaca have 'arrived' – we're still the same as we were when we were 20 playing in the tiniest, stinkiest practice room! Ha ha! We've been privileged enough to do some amazing shows and festivals, but I'm not feeling like, 'Yeah, we've fucking made it.' When you start thinking like that, that's when things go badly."

YOU HAVE TO LAUGH

"The funniest things to look back on are always the ones that weren't funny at all at the time. We've had some absolute dogshit tours where everything's gone wrong and insane things have happened. Those tend to be the ones that are my favourite memories; we did one earlier this year with Get The Shot and it felt like we were cursed. The first show of the tour got cancelled and we were locked in a building during a hostage situation!"

KEEP CALM

"We were playing a show in Germany and the police cordoned off the whole block and told us we couldn't leave. A guy was robbing a pharmacy with a gun and had taken hostages. There were, like, three people who'd turned up to the show really early, so they were stuck with us. We just hung out with them and drank, played

WILL IRELAND

Growing up, Djamila looked up to bands such as Kittie and Jack Off Jill

"WE DIDN'T TAKE IT SERIOUSLY UNTIL THE ARMED SWAT TEAM ARRIVED"

card games. We didn't take it seriously until the armed SWAT team arrived with big sniper rifles. Me and Dom [Moss, bass] kept sneaking off to the fire escape to have cigarettes and started hearing shots. Luckily no one was hurt, but we couldn't leave until one or two in the morning."

IT'S NOT CONTROVERSIAL TO WANT BETTER

"I don't think anything I've ever said is controversial, and the people who think it is are generally the problem. I'm not peddling extreme views. It's more, 'people deserve respect', 'treat people like human beings'. We've had a lot of pushback. I've been doxed and we've had Nazis come after us, as well as so much abuse in my inbox. But more often, it's not about what I've said, it's more about who I am – being a woman, being an Arab, whatever. People find excuses to be shitty. But I don't say things for clout or to get a rise."

HARD WORK PAYS OFF

"*They Fear Us* is our proudest achievement. We put so much into that record, so much hard work, and it's nice when people say nice things about it afterwards, it feels very vindicating. It was such a tumultuous time for us, that I'm so proud of it and of us, because we've done so much to get where we are."

BE KIND TO EACH OTHER

"We've toured with so many nice bands, but Big Thief stand out because that tour was so different to anything else we'd done. They're a folk band, but that tour was so punk. They introduced a level of peacefulness, there was no ego, they treated us so kindly. It changed how I approach being a touring musician – just allowing ourselves some grace."

BE KIND TO YOURSELF

"I write organically – I never have a particular idea or concept in mind. I write and don't really know where its going, so only afterwards will I realise what a song is actually about. The first album is so different lyrically, it's coloured by so much self-loathing. It was literally me talking about how much I hated myself, these experiences of being hurt and then blaming myself for that. Coming round to *They Fear Us* felt so different, because I got to a point where I was done with hating myself like that – I didn't deserve it any more and I needed time to heal, to turn that anger outwards and realise that sometimes people are just shit." H

***THEY FEAR US* IS OUT NOW VIA HASSLE. ITHACA WILL PERFORM THE ALBUM IN FULL AT THE DOME, LONDON ON NOVEMBER 25**

WILL IRELAND

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THE STORY BEHIND

THE TASTE OF INK

THE USED

The song that helped kick nu metal to the kerb and usher in the commercial rise of emo

WORDS: EMILY SWINGLE

The Used (left to right): Jeph Howard, Quinn Allman, Bert McCracken, Branden Steineckert

BY THE EARLY 2000s, nu metal was no longer the undisputed top dog when it came to heavy music. Granted, relative latecomers such as Evanescence's *Fallen* would still climb up international charts, but the scene as a whole had become formulaic, with many of its originators moving on or distancing themselves from an increasingly toxic crop of johnny-come-latelys. Alternative music was in sore need of a shake-up, and tonally shifted towards something more nakedly confessional. On The Used's 2002 debut single, *The Taste Of Ink*, vocalist Bert McCracken had one thing to say: "Here I am."

Originally penned for the band's 2001 demo tape, commonly referred to as their 'Demos From The Basement', *The Taste Of Ink* captured the band's earnest desire to be heard. Fresh out of rehab and living in then-guitarist Quinn Allman's dank, tobacco-scented basement, Bert had come to a decision: "I needed to get out of Utah," he admits today, reflecting on the period that helped make The Used stars of the rising emo scene.

"I'd been living at Quinn's parents' house for months, and it was getting to a point where I was in a dark place," Bert admits. "I'd been doing heavy drugs since I was 16, and I had just quit crystal meth. The guys were all sober and they would take me to Narcotics Anonymous meetings every day. But I was barely scraping by, buying cigarettes instead of food…"

The Taste Of Ink would be Bert's ticket out of Utah, out of the purgatory of sofa-surfing and living in bandmates' basements. The band had already recorded an instrumental demo of the track, but it now fell to Bert to dig deep and craft its lyrics. Only, as their frontman was a recovering drug addict with a propensity for benders, the rest of The Used were more than a little concerned he might not actually come through.

Putting off the task until the early hours of the morning, Bert found himself scribbling away until, as the song itself attests, "*four o'clock in the fucking morning*". In Bert's mind, his only means of escape lay squarely within the tip of his chewed-up pen – so on he worked.

"As I was writing, there was this feeling of longing, this intense desire to just escape," he explains. "The verses ended up feeling so desperate and then the chorus was just so free, capturing this want, to do what we've always dreamed of doing – to be on tour, to be out in the world."

THE FACTS

RELEASED:
2002

ALBUM:
The Used

PERSONNEL:
Bert McCracken (vocals), Branden Steineckert (drums), Quinn Allman (guitars), Jeph Howard (bass)

HIGHEST CHART POSITION:
19 (US Billboard Alternative)

Even in its crudest form, *The Taste Of Ink* was enough to put The Used's heart-on-sleeve brand of emo on people's radar. After hearing their basement demos, record producer and Goldfinger frontman John Feldmann offered to fly The Used over to LA to re-record some tracks.

"John flew us out on his own dime," Bert reveals. "We re-recorded *The Taste Of Ink*, *Maybe Memories* and *A Box Full Of Sharp Objects*."

Despite Bert's lyrical dedication, John also suggested that the band change *The Taste Of Ink*'s chorus.

"I can't even remember the words to the original chorus…" Bert mumbles, after several attempts to recall it. Considering the song's eventual success would expose The Used to audiences around the world, it was a decision that paid off, and not long after the band had re-recorded the songs, they found themselves fighting off label interest.

"It was insane!" Bert exclaims. "I was barely 18 and getting flown around the country, taken to bars, fancy hotels and strip clubs. Every day, it was the newest, worst hangover that I'd ever had. After all the madness, there was

GETTY/MICK HUTSON

this one moment of us all being on Venice Beach like, 'I can't believe this is really about to happen for us.'"

But while *The Taste Of Ink* was written with a desire to be heard, the immediacy of the spotlight almost proved to be too much.

"There was a moment, while we were making the debut record, where I actually just disappeared – I had to," he admits. "I met some random girl, turned off my phone, and went up to Santa Barbara for two weeks. I was unsure about everything, so uncomfortable around the money people were flashing. I hated the BMWs. I hated seeing myself being blasted on fucking [MTV show] *TRL*."

Despite this wobble, Bert completed the band's self-titled debut album. Released on June 25, 2002, it arrived as emo and its more metal-adjacent subgenre, screamo, were becoming a major commercial force, ushering in a whole new means of self-expression. Alongside bands such as Alexisonfire and Thursday, The Used were not only pioneering the movement, but helping bring it to mass audiences and, a little over a year after the album came out, it was certified gold in the US.

"Everything felt brand new," Bert reflects. "Music just felt so much more emotional. It was kind of the huge craze of the moment. For me, [90s 'second wave' emo band] Sunny Day Real Estate were my intro into what kind of band I wanted to be in, the words I wanted to share."

"I HAD JUST QUIT CRYSTAL METH"

BERT McCRACKEN

Forged out of vulnerability and desperation, *The Taste Of Ink* was emotionally matter-of-fact in contrast to nu metal's stifling angst.

"I didn't have much respect for nu metal at the time – I was more of a hardcore kid," Bert admits. "[Emo] was a new way to express emotions. People were really drawn to it, they connected with it. We wanted to create a kind of mirror of humanity, make music you could explore your own life through. Everyone has heartaches – pain, joy, trouble and everything in between. It was our goal to capture that."

However, it also meant The Used attracted criticism from those who were still clinging to what had come before, and they were an easy target for people who felt emo was too whiny.

"Moving from this nu metal phase into this type of effeminate post-hardcore, post-punk… people said we'd ruined music," Bert says with a snort. "I think when we were on the radio, or MTV, there was a lot of hate. Admittedly, even I felt weird about it. It felt like we were just putting on a big show."

But to Bert, The Used's musical and lyrical approach was just a reflection of his own desire to create music that offered solace and escapism.

"Writing and music was a saving grace for me growing up, a really powerful escape from anything that was going on," he says. "When emo was just starting up, it felt like this type of music was a saving grace for everyone else. It was almost like a religion where we all felt comfortable crying while listening to songs. A lot ▶

Bert McCracken performing at New York's Hammerstein Ballroom on November 1, 2002. A long way from basement dwelling!

GETTY

"IT'S A PERFECT EMO SONG AND IT ALWAYS WILL BE"

BERT McCRACKEN

of bands had a similar mindset, coming out of the post-hardcore movement with some screaming, some singing… but we were lucky enough to be one of the first bands to get that break."

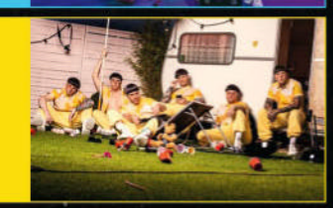
The Taste Of Ink may have been penned in total ignorance as to whether anyone would ever hear it, but it ignited the scene and captured something remarkable, as new generations embraced emotional candour like never before. Looking back, Bert admits it's a track that reminds him of those years of longing to be heard. Now, every night on tour, 18-year-old Bert's existential howl of *'Is it worth it, can you even hear me?'* is answered with a deafening singalong from venues packed with fans. So how would young Bert respond, if he could hear that? He'd probably be quite unfazed, the now-41-year-old jokes.

"When I was younger, I was braggadocious, kind of a prick… so I feel like, if you told me *The Taste Of Ink* was going to be a hit, I would have said 'Well, of course,'" he says with a laugh. "But, honestly, it is amazing. It's so humbling seeing fans bring their kids along now, the *next* generation. We just played Sydney and brought all the kids on stage during *The Taste Of Ink*, and it just made the song feel even more magical – seeing the future of the world bopping along…"

The first single from their 2002 self-titled debut album, *The Taste Of Ink* was something special, as much a statement of intent as it was a rallying cry for disenfranchised youths who had grown tired of nu metal's loudness and wanted to communally and openly name their feelings.

"Everyone just knew *The Taste Of Ink* was going to be the first single," Bert says. "Before the record was even out, there was this moment at Warped Tour that made it obvious the song was special. We were playing a small stage, and the power went out while we were playing *The Taste Of Ink*… and the whole crowd just finished the entire song a cappella. It was such an incredible moment for us. For us, it's a perfect emo song, and it always will be."

***TOXIC POSITIVITY* IS OUT NOW VIA BIG NOISE. THE USED'S UK TOUR STARTS IN MANCHESTER ON DECEMBER 4**



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YOUR SHOUT

BABYMETAL AREN'T BABIES ANYMORE

…and other declarations and observations you had to offer on Babymetal's return to the cover of *Hammer*, as well as our features on Immortal, Ghost, Skindred and more!

Man, did you folks have a lot to say about our Babymetal cover feature last issue!

SO SU ME

Is it bad that I still haven't listened to one song of Babymetal? I mean, I know who they are, but I have yet to actually listen to one of their songs.

Yvanthemilkman, Twitter/X

Well, what are you waiting for?! There's certainly no better time than now with the band back in full swing and a trio again for the first time in five years. We envy the voyage of discovery that awaits you!

TRIPLE THREAT

Babymetal is such a fantastic group. While some people may not be too excited about it, I'm glad the majority of fans accepted Momometal. She's been doing such a great job and has been killing it during the 2023 Babyklok tour! She deserves all the respect for working so hard to become a part of the trio.

Alexis Kissinger, Facebook

We couldn't agree more, Alexis! It's no small feat joining such a well-established group, and Momometal has more than put the work in to make sure this new era of Babymetal will be just as exciting as we've come to expect.

BLAME CANADA

Isn't Tobias Forge like the Nickelback of metal?

Autumn Sky, Facebook

In that only posers want to bellyache about Ghost? Yes, we think that sounds about right, Autumn!

MAXIMUM HORMOAN

You know who's a lot better than Babymetal? Maximum The Hormone. So much talent oozing out of that band and somehow America and the UK are stuck on Babymetal.

Bubblin_verde, Instagram

Why not love both bands? Seems a bit daft to us to arbitrarily pick one band and ignore all the other great stuff coming out!

TRVE CAT METAL

Just read the Immortal feature in issue 379 – wait, black metal cats are actually A THING?!

Emily Roe, email

It shouldn't come as too much of a surprise, Emily – after all, if there's one animal that exudes the aloof nihilism and self-determination of black metal, it's surely our feline friends. That's why we love 'em.

ALL GROWED UP

It's time for a new name… Babymetal are not babies anymore.

Kedurocha, Instagram

Yep, there's definitely a massive sonic – and aesthetic – evolution on Babymetal's latest album, *The Other One*. At least, we hope that's

#TWEETS

I just read that dinosaur meat tasted like chicken.
Nick Holmes, Paradise Lost (@NickHolmesPL)

Some days I'm a Scene Queen and other days I'm a dairy queen. What can I say?
Scene Queen (@scenequeenrocks)

A bad day recently reminded me that bad days are not only inevitable, they are essential. It's important to feel every emotion in order to master every emotion. Accept it, embrace it, move on.
Ginger Wildheart, The Wildhearts (@GingerWildheart)

My kids are watching Up and I'm just not looking at the screen or being able to hear.
Ol Drake, Evile (@old_rake)

Every few weeks someone that follows me gets angry about my pro trans tweets like what did you expect?
Backxwash (@backxwash)

BABYMETAL: PRESS/ART DIRECTION & DESIGN: YODAMETAL (ROKUSHIKI)
PHOTOGRAPHY: SUSUMETAL (PROGRESS-M)

Well metal, obviously

what you meant – after all, they've not been actual babies for a couple of decades now…

FROM RAGGA TO RICHES

I saw Skindred way back at Ozzfest 2002 and they were great but I didn't think they would go on to have the success they have. Fair play to them!
Philip Jones, Facebook

After more than 20 years of bringing massive smiles to metalheads around the world – and being unlike just about anybody else – we reckon it's richly deserved and long overdue!

TOP PICK

Babymetal is what brought me back to the metal scene after over 30 years! I thank them for leading me to Band-Maid, and especially LOVEBITES!!!
Anthony Powell, Facebook

Exactly the kind of thing we love to hear, Anthony! Babymetal can be an introduction to a whole other realm of metal that many fans can miss, so we're not sure why people get so up in arms about them – particularly when they've been around for more than a decade by this point!

NINE OUT OF 10 AIN'T BAD

My copy of *Hammer* arrived yesterday. I don't think I've read a *Metal Hammer* that has given so many 9/10 album reviews in one issue!
Chamberlain, Instagram

What can we say? September and early October have some insanely good records coming out! Just imagine how we feel – right as we thought our albums of the year lists were practically sewn up! Now we've got to start all over again.

THE BIG DEBATE

Thirty years since Bruce Dickinson departed Iron Maiden, we spoke to Blaze Bayley about his tenure in the band and how he felt when they reunited with Bruce.

HE SAID

"It was horrific. I'd be making all these plans for my solo career: 'I'm going to come back with a new project, I'm going to use everything I learned… And then a couple of hours later, I'd be sobbing… I was destroyed."

YOU SAY

"It wasn't Bruce, but I actually prefer the two Blaze albums to *No Prayer For The Dying*."
Andy Lynam, Facebook

"I cried my eyes out when I heard him IN the band! Thank god it was only a couple of albums!"
Paul Tadday, Facebook

"I don't know why he gets so much shit. Blaze's time with Maiden was not glorious but his albums are good."
Daniel_RuizG, Twitter/X

"I'm sorry but those two albums do not exist in my Maiden discography. Some good songs, yes, but overall it's not Iron Maiden."
Helena Ferreira, Facebook

"He had a thankless task but he did the best he could. He may have been upset but he's never come across as bitter."
Michael Judd, Facebook

"Blaze's Maiden albums both contain stone cold classics."
Tailgunner, Facebook

"Blaze gets a lot of flack for that era of Maiden but he was far from the only problem."
Niki Jones, Facebook

JOIN THE BIG DEBATE AT FACEBOOK.COM/GROUPS/METALHAMMERREADERS

HAMMER STEREO

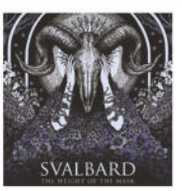
What's been blowing our office speakers

WITHIN TEMPTATION
Bleed Out
"Bold statements wrapped in bold modern metal"
ELEANOR GOODMAN
EDITOR

MARTHE
Further In Evil
"A raw yet endlessly exploratory tour through extreme metal's most fevered outposts"
JONATHAN SELZER
REVIEWS EDITOR

CREEPER
Sanguivore
"Catchier than the common cold. You'll be humming it for weeks"
VANESSA THORPE
PRODUCTION EDITOR

CREEPER
Sanguivore
"The escapist tonic needed as the nights draw in and the world goes batshit"
LOUISE BROCK
ART EDITOR



SVALBARD
The Weight Of The Mask
"Emotional, empowering, immaculate: Svalbard break hearts in the very best way"
RICH HOBSON
STAFF WRITER

CREEPER
Sanguivore
"Officially 2023's greatest goth-punk vampire rock opera"
DAVE EVERLEY
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

GETTY

NEW NOISE

BETTER LOVERS

Former Every Time I Die and Dillinger Escape Plan men unite forces to tear the world of hardcore a new one… again

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL • PICTURES: GABE BECERRA

THE SHOCK AND sadness that surrounded the acrimonious split of Every Time I Die in January 2022 still lingers, and even though The Dillinger Escape Plan haven't been a going concern since 2017, plenty of fans still mourn them. So, when the key members of both bands announced they were coming together to form Better Lovers, it felt like a dream for fans of challenging, chaotic and furiously noisy music.

"You have to have that humbleness," smiles guitarist Jordan Buckley. "But you also need to know that you're fucking killers and you're going to blow everyone away. Not just because of the name, but because of what we know we're all so capable of."

If a new band rocked up on the scene with this level of confidence, you might baulk and dismiss them as cocky upstarts. However, Jordan spent the last couple of decades smashing out iconic riffs for ETID, and has kept his bandmates Steve Micciche on bass and drummer Clayton 'Goose' Holyoak in his new project, alongside super-producer and Fit For An Autopsy guitarist Will Putney and, most excitingly of all, former TDEP frontman Greg Puciato – so it's fair to say his confidence is well founded.

"In 16 years of touring with Dillinger, Every Time I Die were the only band that kicked our ass, ever!" Greg tells us. "That was the only time I ever felt that. I remember shows where there was nothing we could do; they had taken the night. So, I knew that if you put me at the driving force of that band, we'd be unstoppable."

As good as Better Lovers look on paper, they are already proving that they are more than capable of living up to both the lofty expectations of their rabid fanbases and their own unshakable belief in what they can be. Their debut EP, the 15-minute long, four-track attack *God Made Me An Animal*, is one of the finest examples of savage modern hardcore you'll hear in 2023.

"These are all dudes that take my ideas and bring them out into the world and make them better," Jordan explains. "There are riffs on this EP that, even when I thought the songs were the best they could be, Will would say, 'I'm going to replace your worst riff with a new one that is the best one in the song.' By the time it gets to Greg it's really ready to go. I knew I could trust the process, that these songs wouldn't come out unless they had the best riffs, best mix, best production, best vocals."

The mutual respect between the members of Better Lovers, who have known each other since the beginnings of their careers, is tangible. Jordan describes Greg as his first choice for vocalist when he started writing material for the band, putting him on "The Mount Rushmore… of one", while Greg struggles to name another guitarist from the post-2000s hardcore scene who is more unique than Jordan.

"In the last 25 years, I can't name any other band that has as strong or as impactful a footprint as Every Time I Die," he begins. "And most of that is because of Jordan's writing, his very distinct and unique sound. I gravitate to strong flavours, because I'm a strong flavour, so I want someone else to have that. I can't name any other guitar players from our scene that have what Jordan has. It's very rare."

The other thing it's worth noting is that Better Lovers came together due to the friendship and respect of the participants, rather than some cynical

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: The crazy, unpredictable, careering riffola of ETID with the cathartic howls and melodic nous of Greg's finest TDEP performances

FOR FANS OF: The Chariot, END, Botch

LISTEN TO: *Become So Small*

Damn right they're a supergroup, no matter how much they hate the word!

PRESS/GABE BECERRA

attempt at being a 'supergroup' (a phrase that makes Greg look as if he's about to vomit when it's mentioned). Instead, Greg and Jordan met up when Jordan and Converge drummer Ben Koller attended a Jerry Cantrell show. Greg was playing with Jerry, and the old friends ended up back on Jerry's bus having a good time. At one point during the evening, Jordan happened to mention he had been working on new music.

"We were just having a blast in the front of Jerry's bus, eating pizza, getting fucked up and acting the fool, and I just said, 'Dude, send me those songs,'" shrugs Greg, before admitting that it took him some time to find his own voice within music as well

"EVERY TIME I DIE WERE THE ONLY BAND THAT KICKED DILLINGER ESCAPE PLAN'S ASS"

GREG PUCIATO

defined as Jordan's. "I had to sit and wait and let it soak in. One day at 2am it just started coming out of me fast. Since then, it's been foot on the gas pedal – there's electricity here, you don't get too many of those moments."

It's a relationship that looks set to give us plenty more music in the near future. With the band currently stationed at Will Putney's house, Jordan enthuses that Better Lovers could record new material at any minute.

"We've got that magic where, whatever we set our mind to, it'll happen," he says. "If we want to put out a full-length album by the end of the year then we'll do it. There's no shortage of ideas, there's no shortage of music."

So, ETID and TDEP lovers, mourn no longer: Better Lovers might just be your new favourite band.

***GOD MADE ME AN ANIMAL* IS OUT NOW VIA SHARPTONE**

NEW NOISE

AS EVERYTHING UNFOLDS

Ultra-hooky Buckinghamshire band on course to become UK metalcore royalty

WORDS: YASMINE SUMMAN

"CHAOTIC, ANTHEMIC AND cinematic," are the three words Charlie Rolfe feels best summarise her band, As Everything Unfolds, contenders for the title of UK metalcore's newest 'it' band. When they're not appearing on every UK festival line-up possible, or touring with the likes of Enter Shikari and Electric Callboy, they're writing moody metalcore tracks with insatiable poppy verses that are guaranteed to stick in your head on loop.

The band's vocalist and chief songwriter, Charlie is also a huge film and TV buff and a photography graduate, and her affinity for those subjects plays into the visual aspects of the band.

"Our albums are based on loose concepts," she explains. "The first album [2021's *Within Each Lies The Other*] was based off the magician tarot card, and then our new album, *Ultraviolet*, is based around the idea of ultraviolet light and how it changes our perspective."

Released in April, *Ultraviolet* saw As Everything Unfolds smashing expectations set by their debut, as their hard work paid off and several songs broke the one million streams mark on Spotify.

"Our first record was like trial by fire. You don't really know what you're doing," Charlie admits. "The second time around, we needed to focus more on the sound of the album, making sure it sounds different. We loved the mix on *The Greatest Mistake Of My Life* by Holding Absence, so we asked Taylor Larson to produce."

It's a decision that clearly paid off, with Taylor helping the band hone their innate talent for anthemic choruses that has made them such a perfect choice for festivals, where you can often hear the crowd long before you actually *see* the band. Considering the leap fellow British metalcore reformists like Architects and Bring Me The Horizon have made in recent years, it's undoubtedly a promising sign. H

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: Electro-infused, arena-ready modern metalcore

FOR FANS OF: Spiritbox, Bring Me The Horizon, Architects

LISTEN TO: *Slow Down*

***ULTRAVIOLET* IS OUT NOW VIA LONG BRANCH**

HEALTHYLIVING

The Scottish alternative trio embracing life's little mistakes

WORDS: CATHERINE MORRIS• PICTURES: CHRIS SCOTT

VOLTAIRE WARNED THAT 'perfect is the enemy of good', and Edinburgh-based alternative trio Healthyliving certainly took that to heart when crafting their debut, *Songs Of Abundance, Psalms Of Grief*. Collaborators Amaya López-Carromero and Scott McLean had already worked together on several musical projects – Maud The Moth, Ashenspire, Falloch and Tyrannus, to name but a few – so when it came to writing music for the nascent Healthyliving, they knew they had to take a different approach to songwriting this time – namely, not to obsess over perfection.

"The songs had to be finished in one sitting," explains Scott. "To try and provoke a sense of immediacy and pick up whatever was going on in that moment. Often when I look back on songs I've written that way, I find I like it more than the stuff I thought I'd done perfectly."

Honouring this process and seeing the songs as "living things, that I try to have a conversation with", as singer Amaya describes it, lead them to create *Songs Of Abundance...*, an eloquent, heartfelt meditation on finding beauty in the mundane. Though they namecheck the likes of Queen Adreena, Nirvana and Portishead as their major influences, they sound like none of those bands; they aren't trying to emulate anybody else.

Even the band's name is a tongue-in-cheek rejection of the notion of perfection, as Amaya explains: "You open social media and there's all this insistence on some form of betterment," she sighs. "But life is fucking complex, there are no easy fixes." H

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: Introspective, expansive alternative rock languishing between shoegaze, doom and post-punk, with a heart-stopping vocal

FOR FANS OF: Messa, The Oath, Shaam Larein

LISTEN TO: *Galleries*

***SONGS OF ABUNDANCE, PSALMS OF GRIEF* IS OUT NOW VIA LA RUBIA PRODUCCIONES. HEALTHYLIVING TOUR THE UK IN DECEMBER**

PRESS

IGNEA

Ukrainian prog metallers with their sights on the world

WORDS: JON GARCIA

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: Wayfaring cinematic metal that will fuel your imagination and rack up stamps in your passport

FOR FANS OF: Arch Enemy, Epica, Ad Infinitum

LISTEN TO: *Dunes*

IGNEA WEAVE A cinematic tapestry of symphonic, progressive and death metal, heavily influenced by their Ukrainian musical heritage. Their third LP lives up to its name, immersing listeners in 'Dreams Of Lands Unseen' via a concept that follows the journey of Ukrainian travel documentarian Sofia Yablonska, who explored the world in the 1920s–40s. Ignea, who formed in 2013, trace Sofia's footsteps to Morocco, the Sahara, China and beyond, bringing the sounds of those destinations to your headphones, while also highlighting their own culture through passages sung in their native tongue.

"I want people to hear Ukrainian language, which is not very common among metal bands," explains vocalist Helle Bohdanova. "I want people to have this journey, to feel immersed in this experience and feel like they are listening to more than just an album."

Keyboardist Yevhenii Zhytniuk is Ignea's composer, while Helle deals with their lyrical message. Although *Dreams Of Lands Unseen* is undoubtedly a concept record, it can stand even without knowledge of Sofia's journey, its hypnotising melodies and thrashing gutturals seeing moods rise and fall like a ship on the ocean.

"We want the stories to be an integral part of our music," Helle admits. "But if a random person listens to the lyrics, you can attribute them to your daily life, this feeling of homesickness and the will to discover new places."

***DREAMS OF LANDS UNSEEN* IS OUT NOW VIA NAPALM. IGNEA SUPPORT FEAR FACTORY ON TOUR FROM OCTOBER 27**

WORLD GONE COLD

Electro-infused metalcore from former members of P.O.D., Attack Attack! and Demon Hunter

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: Crushing modern metalcore, with surprise vocal hooks that Usher would be proud of

FOR FANS OF: Issues, Poppy, Bring Me The Horizon

LISTEN TO: *Burn*

WITH AN ECLECTIC line-up consisting of former members of P.O.D., Attack Attack! and Demon Hunter, you'd be hard pressed to guess what World Gone Cold sound like. Even the band were confused when they started out. "When we sat down, we really didn't know what it was," admits vocalist Ryland Raus.

Ryland tells us the band got together as a fool-around thing, with more and more members being added to the line-up because they were friends of friends, before "it just got crazy!"

"Electronics? Throw them in there!" he says excitedly. "I like the poppy stuff, so let's lean in on that. It got real weird, and, next thing you know, we got our own thing going on."

The result is World Gone Cold's excellently catchy, slightly unhinged self-titled debut EP, comfortable indulging in a variety of metal genres while being unashamed to embrace what's in the charts.

"We couldn't be happier with the sound that came out," smiles Ryland. "It's heavy, it's poppy, it's groovy – it's exactly what I wanted to make. I have a broad set of tastes, and it's cool to feel like all of that is represented here."

***WORLD GONE COLD* IS OUT NOW VIA ROCKFEST**

PRESS. DINO CAZERES: PRESS/STEPHANIE CABRAL

IN THE KNOW

What your favourite bands are listening to

REPENTANCE

"There's a band out of Chicago called Repentance and they have a really, really good metal sound. They're one of those bands that are doing something retro, but adding a modern twist to it. That's a bit of a trend over here in America, with bands like SpiritWorld. They're nothing like Fear Factory – that's not all I like! Ha ha!"

DINO CAZARES, FEAR FACTORY

HOARD ALMIGHTY

Box sets, underground oddities and all the essential merch you need this month

W.A.S.P.

THE 7 SAVAGE: 1984-1992 - 8LP BOX SET

MADFISH

£199.99

FUNNY TO THINK that W.A.S.P. were once seen as the most shocking band in the world. What quaint times those must've been, eh? While the lyrics to *Animal (Fuck Like A Beast)* still read like the lusty thoughts of a horny virgin, there's no denying that when the band hit home they were pretty unstoppable. This limited-to-2,000 box set is a suitably big bastard, with the music spanning eight slabs of half-speed-mastered vinyl that take in the band's first five studio albums, their *Live... In The Raw* outing and a disc's worth of oddments. If you can stop headbanging for long enough to use your eyes, you'll also be treated to a Blackie Lawless poster (phwoar), a 60-page book and a 'certificate of authenticity' that's shaped, playfully, like a buzzsaw. The only qualm? That's there's no goddamn leopard print to go with the swish, leather-effect packaging.

tinyurl.com/wasp-box

NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS ONESIE

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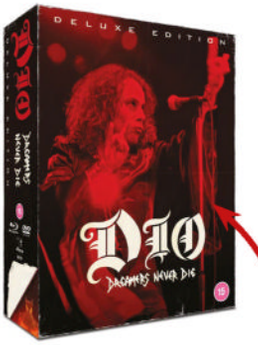
If an Oogie Boogie burlap sack is too racy for regular bedtime, try out this batty onesie. It's 100% polyester, zips up with a cute Jack Skellington detail, and even features (disclaimer: extremely non-functional) wings.

tinyurl.com/night-onesie



DIO DOCUMENTARY BOX SET

£87.97

Dreamers Never Die takes us through the life story of the spirit of metal incarnate, Ronnie James Dio. This DVD/Blu-ray box includes a host of extras, not least a pack of tissues for wiping away the inevitable tears.

tinyurl.com/dio-deluxe

WARGASM HOODIE

£50

Not the Bostonian thrash band. Not the Cradle Of Filth song. The other one. The UK duo's debut studio album, *Venom*, drops on October 27 – get a load of this *Evangelion*-inspired hoodie in the meantime.

tinyurl.com/wargasm-hoodie

HORROR MOVIE CHOPPING BOARD
£11.99

One, two, chopping carrots for stew. Three, four, it's not the main course. Five, six – you get the idea. Let Freddy, Jason, Michael and friends refine your culinary carving. Just remember to lock your door.

tinyurl.com/horror-chop

VIKING TUMBLER
£45

Put your back into the oar and *blow…* into a police breathalyser. You're not piloting any longships after a tipple from this naughty Norsey tumbler, replete with Viking tableaus, intricate detail and optional name engraving.

tinyurl.com/viking-tumbler

WITHIN TEMPTATION T-SHIRT
£24.99

Within Temptation might've once sounded like they were performing an alternate soundtrack for *The Lord Of The Rings*, but new album *Bleed Out* sees them fighting real-life darkness. Spread the word with this spectacular tee!

tinyurl.com/bleedout-tee

GREEN LUNG T-SHIRT
£19

Step into the forest, past several villagers, over a charred Wicker Man, and you'll see gleaming in the clearing Green Lung's third record, *This Heathen Land*. Use this t-shirt to stave off spirits, or something.

tinyurl.com/green-girlie

SHANE EMBURY BOOK
£30/£42.50

Napalm Death helped shape modern metal, and Shane's been with 'em since the mid-80s. Read about the triumphs and travails of this grindcore legend with this embossed hardback book, signed too for a few extra quid.

shanenapalmdeathbook.com

ONE PIECE DOORMAT
£17.99

Celebrate Netflix's spectacular live action adaptation of Eiichiro Oda's beloved manga epic by inviting a host of vagabonds and thrill-seekers in to pilfer all your most prized possessions.

tinyurl.com/onepiece-mat

PRIMORDIAL VINYL BOX SET
£44.99

Irish metallers Primordial return for what could be their last bow with portentous 10th album, *How It Ends*. This edition comes on red vinyl, with a poster, slipmat and tote bag. Very useful for warding off the apocalypse.

tinyurl.com/howitends-box

KISS POTATO HEAD
£18.40

In honour of this leering Mr. Potato Head, Kiss are rerecording key moments from their back catalogue and changing 'love' to 'spud'. Enjoy classics like I Stole Your Spud, Save Your Spud and, of course, Spud Gun. Possibly.

tinyurl.com/kiss-spud

MYRKUR BOX SET
£17.99

Amalie Bruun aka Myrkur's new album, *Spine*, sees the Danish artist move beyond folk and black metal into thrilling new territories. Celebrate with this limited-edition offering that comes with a poster and shiny sticker.

tinyurl.com/myrkur-box

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BETTER NOISE!

Looking for some new music? Major indie label Better Noise have got you covered

There are tons of great bands on the Better Noise roster, and CEO Dan Waite, President Steve Kline and A&R guru Lexie Viklund are always looking to sign more rock and metal acts. Last month we brought you some of our favourite artists from Better Noise, and here are some more albums to blast through your speakers. This is the music you need to hear right now!

CORY MARKS

Former ice hockey player turned singer-songwriter and pilot, Canada's Cory Marks mixes rock'n'roll with country. His 2020 album, *Who I Am*, spawned the hit *Outlaws & Outsiders* (59 million Spotify streams and counting…), featuring Five Finger Death Punch singer Ivan Moody, then-Mötley Crüe guitarist Mick Mars and country heavyweight Travis Tritt. Fresh from an appearance on Eva Under Fire track *Unstoppable*, he's now touring Canada with ZZ Top and working on a third album, due in 2024. His ambition is to duet with Shania Twain – a distinct possibility, since they share the same producer in Kevin Churko.

BAD WOLVES

One cover of The Cranberries' hit song *Zombie* and three albums deep, LA crew Bad Wolves are back next month with new album *Die About It*. It's their second outing with vocalist Daniel 'DL' Laskiewicz, formerly of The Acacia Strain, and if singles *Bad Friend* and *Legends Never Die* are anything to go by, it's gonna be big, harking back to 2018's barnstorming debut record, *Disobey*. Guitarist/co-founder Doc Coyle is currently touring with Ice Nine Kills in support of Metallica, so you just know the new material's gonna sound huge once Bad Wolves hit the road themselves.

THE HU

From captivating Download's Main Stage to playing Glastonbury and getting shown on the BBC – not to mention releasing a deluxe version of last year's second album, *Rumble Of Thunder*, featuring guest spots from System Of A Down's Serj Tankian, DL from Bad Wolves and William DuVall of Alice In Chains – 2023 has been The Hu's year.

Not content with taking over the world with their arresting 'Hunnu rock', the Mongolian band are now hatching a plan to plant 14,000 trees in their home country in the shape of their logo, so it can be seen from actual space. Legends, one and all.

THE RETALIATORS

It's Spooky Season! So what better time to enjoy a scary movie? Enter: *The Retaliators*. Rated 89% by fans on Rotten Tomatoes, it's the story of a pastor who uncovers a dark and twisted underworld while searching for answers about his daughter's brutal murder, and includes cameos from members of Five Finger Death Punch, Papa Roach's Jacoby Shaddix, Mötley Crüe's Tommy Lee and Ice Nine Kills' Spencer Charnas. It's out October 16 on Amazon Prime, Google Play, Sky Store and Apple TV, and the killer soundtrack features all the above bands and more – perfect for getting your Halloween on and scaring yourself silly.

NOTHING MORE

Last year, San Antonio's finest unleashed their brilliant sixth album, *Spirits*, written during the pandemic and exploring the depths of human psychology. Now they have released a deluxe edition, including hard-hitting live versions of the soaring, tech metal-inflected title track, the nu metal-influenced *Face It* and the impassioned combo of *Tired Of Winning / Ships In The Night*, all from their sold-out April headlining show at New York's Irving Plaza. The band have also devised a 25-question *Spirits* personality test to help you work out which 'Spirit Type' you are – take it now over at https://spiritstest.com.

CROSSBONE SKULLY

Longtime Alice Cooper guitarist and valued member of supergroup Hollywood Vampires, Tommy Henriksson has gone solo under the name Crossbone Skully, with his debut album due out next year. Produced by his neighbour, the legendary five-time Grammy Award winner Mutt Lange (AC/DC, Def Leppard, Muse, Shania Twain etc.), it's no surprise a series of rock gods such as Coop and Nikki Sixx are lining up to feature. Keen-eared fans might have heard him playing some new tracks as warm-up music ahead of Hollywood Vampires shows, and his debut is eagerly anticipated.

SOLENCE

New Swedish signings Solence have toured with meme-friendly party-starters Electric Callboy and share management with Ice Nine Kills, so it's fair to say they know their way around a chorus and a breakdown. Last year's *Hope Is A Cult* album boasted the likes of *Rain Down*, a brash, keyboard-tinged banger that gave a rhythmic nod to Slipknot's *Psychosocial*, and *Demons*, a modern, synthy condemnation of the thoughts that haunt you at night. The quartet's new album is due in 2024, and it's bound to be stuffed with massive earworms.

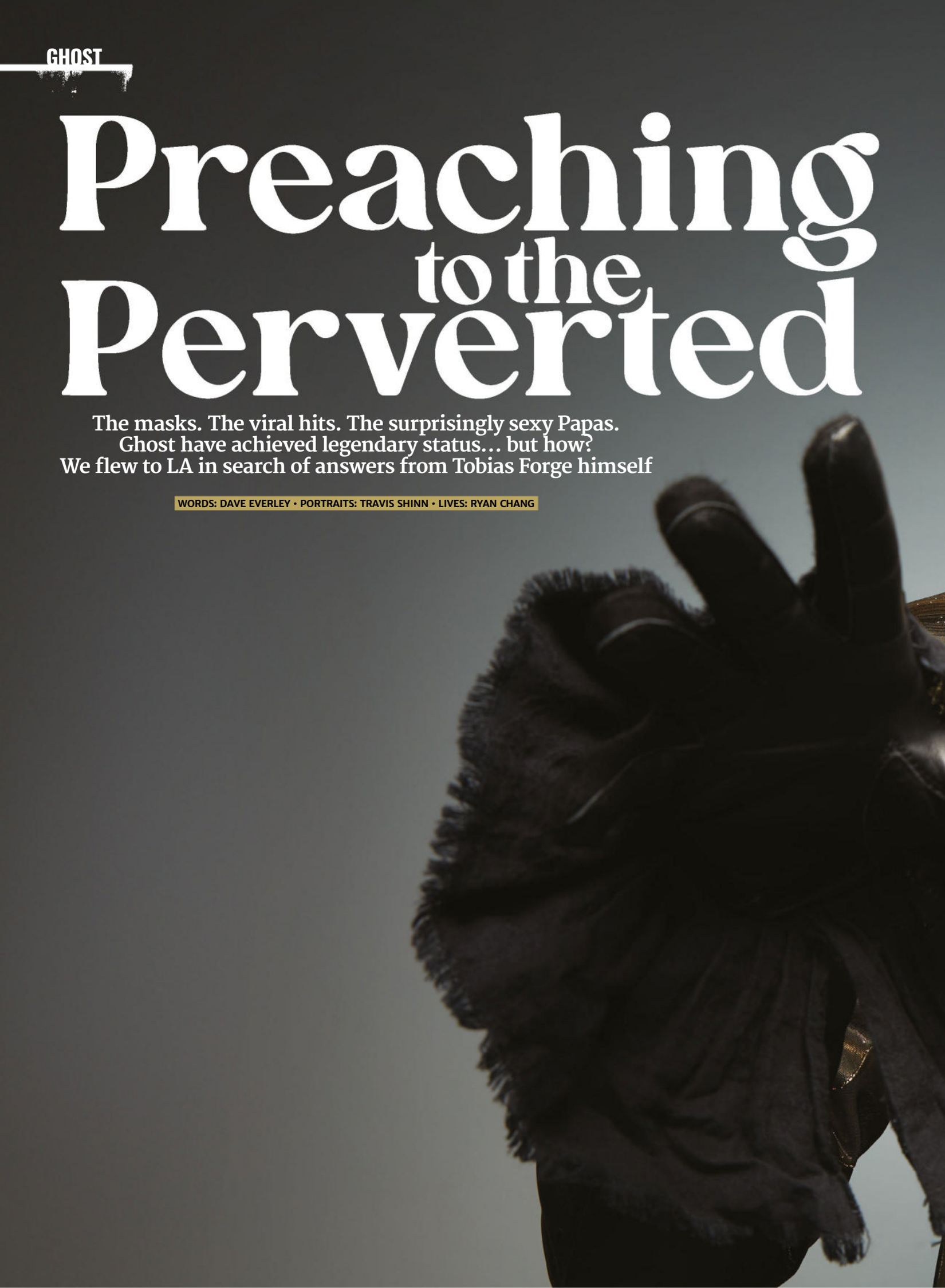
TEMPT

NYC's Tempt have supported Iron Maiden, and bring a similar sense of bombast to their hard rock. Their self-titled album has just dropped, featuring LA's Dorothy on *Living Dangerous* and including funk-flecked fan-favourite *Golden Tongue*. Meanwhile, the video for their single *Roses* was directed by the Emmy-nominated Eric Steinhauser, who used AI to create the backgrounds for the video wall the band play in front of. If you're looking for a dance-around-the-room pick-me-up as the nights draw in, this is the band for you.

Preaching to the Perverted

The masks. The viral hits. The surprisingly sexy Papas. Ghost have achieved legendary status… but how? We flew to LA in search of answers from Tobias Forge himself

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY • PORTRAITS: TRAVIS SHINN • LIVES: RYAN CHANG



As the lights go up in Los Angeles' Kia Forum, Papa Emeritus IV surveys the thousands of people in front of him and beams as widely as a man in a full-face mask can beam.

"Go home and fuck somebody!" says Ghost's singer, his voice crackling with elation. "And if you can't find somebody, go fuck yourself!"

This is the second of two consecutive nights the Swedish band have played in this 17,5000-capacity arena, bringing the US leg of their current Re-Imperatour tour to a close. Even by Ghost's own standards, the Forum shows are outrageously entertaining: part joyously unholy communion, part retina-searing high-camp heavy metal revue, with Papa Emeritus as the snake-hipped MC. There are eight Nameless Ghouls up there with him, while the set is punctuated by various explosions, curtains of sparks, double-digit costume changes for Papa Emeritus and a cameo from a sax-playing Papa Nihil, the decrepit and quite possibly dead elder statesthing of the Ghost universe.

There have been surprises, too. There's the smaller second stage at the far end of the arena where Papa and a stripped-down backing band perform an emotional version of *If You Have Ghosts*. And there's the troupe of eight skeleton suit-clad dancers, unveiled for the first time at these two shows, who writhe and pirouette through *Impera* track *Twenties* – making its own high-kicking live debut at the Forum – and *Dance Macabre* from 2018's *Prequelle*. On both nights, the dancers' performance culminates with Papa being hoisted above their heads, like the strangest *Strictly Come Dancing* final ever.

Except anyone who isn't here won't have seen that, at least not yet. No filming is allowed at these shows. Fans are asked to place their mobile phones and smart watches in grey Yondr pouches that remain locked until the end of the gig. Warnings around the arena threaten that anyone caught surreptitiously filming or taking photos will be ejected.

"WE ARE ESSENTIALLY SHOOTING A FILM"

Draconian? Sure. But there are two reasons for it. The first ties in with the sense that this chapter in Ghost's career, which started with 2022's blockbusting *Impera* album, is coming to an end, and with it Papa Emeritus IV's time as the band's frontman.

The second is no less exciting. Tonight's gigs are reportedly being filmed, though for what is a mystery. It could be a video, it could be a concert film, it could be a full-fledged movie. No one is certain, and Tobias Forge – the man in the mask at the centre of it all – isn't letting on.

It's three days after the second and final Forum show when *Hammer* speaks to Tobias. He's 25 minutes late to our midday Zoom call.

"I am so sorry," he croaks when he eventually appears. It turns out he's just got out of bed after deciding to let his hair down last night.

"I had a complete blow-out," he says. "I don't normally party on tour, because you want to be in great shape every day. But after four days of really hard work to do these shows, I just wanted want to cleanse myself."

Groggy or not, he powers through his hangover like the trooper he is. Understandable, since he's still basking in the triumph of pulling off such an audacious show.

"When I first started putting it together, I was like, 'Oh my god, I'm going to faint because there's so much to think about,'" he says. "Then it was, like, 'No, no, just don't think about it at all.'"

If he's relieved and exhilarated about the shows, he's exultant and unrepentant about the decision to ban mobile phones from the shows.

"I have never seen a crowd interact the way that they did since I was in a club band," he says. "They were the best shows I've ever done with Ghost, just because I didn't have to see those fucking mobile phones."

He's less forthcoming about the reason behind the no-phones edict. In an interview earlier this year, he hinted that a film was on Ghost's to-do list, teasing that the LA shows would "be different to the others".

"We were essentially shooting a film," he says now. "And we used two nights of crowds as extras.

Are you talking about a traditional concert film, or were you shooting something else?

"It's going to be a film with a concert element. So a lot of what you experienced [at the two LA shows] is going to be part of this project."

OK. Is it kinda in the same ballpark as Metallica's 2013 *Through The Never* film, which combined live footage with a movie-style narrative?

"In the sense that it's a concert with something else combined," he says.

Pushing any further is pointless. Not for the last time in our conversation, he's given up as much as he wants to about what Ghost's future might hold.

On March 12, 2010, Tobias posted three songs – *Prime Mover, Stand By Him* and *Death Knell*, which he had written and recorded a couple of years earlier – to MySpace under the name Ghost. He was 29 years old at the time, with a string of largely unsuccessful metal and rock bands under his belt. He had recently become the father of twins, and Ghost – essentially Tobias and whichever musician friends he could rope in to help him out – felt like the last roll of the dice.

It paid off. By most measures, Ghost are the breakout metal band of the last decade, building an ardent following that was swollen even further by the belated viral success of 2019's single B-side *Mary On A Cross*, after it became the unofficial occult metal anthem of TikTok. Is it a surprise just how big this weird, occult metal band have become or did he secretly always expect it?

"Not always, of course not," he says. "When I started writing songs for Ghost, I felt that it was a great way to combine the music styles that I loved: melodic music, but also metal – and specifically darker metal. On the one hand I wanted it to sound like early NWOBHM, bands like Angel Witch and Demon and Warlord. But also for it to have a dark touch that lent credence to black metal and death metal."

But that's not really a recipe for success on this scale, is it?

"No, but at that point I was feeling like I might never become a professional musician, which was always my lifelong dream. I thought, 'I'm probably not going to be able to live off music, but if I'm going to live with myself, I need one band that I can make fucking count.' I thought it would be cool to do a theatrical band, maybe do a show here and there… But I never thought it was going to be big. I thought it was going to be this little alternative thing that could develop a cult following over time."

Except Ghost have become so much more than Tobias's "little alternative thing", even if he's not always been aware of how crazy things have become.

"You don't necessarily see how things are growing," he says. "You don't wake up and go, 'Wow, I can't believe that.' But there have been pivotal moments, like playing with

Papa Emeritus IV... but for how much longer?

Metallica or Iron Maiden for the first time, where you go, 'Fuck, I can't believe this is happening.' So yeah, it has surprised me."

In one of the stairwells of the Forum, two 20-something Ghost fans dressed as nuns are talking sex.

"Papa is definitely sexy," says one of them, Lisa. "It's the pants. Tight."

"I'm down with that," says her friend, Ryan, his wimple offset by a thick beard.

Papa Emeritus's elevation to the status of sex symbol is definitely one of the more unexpected developments in the Ghost story. The first two incarnations of the character were imposing, scarily solemn figures in papal robes and mitres.

Things began to change with the release of 2015's *Meliora* and the introduction of the 'younger' Papa Emeritus III, all thrusting hips and Elvis wriggles. Papa III and his replacement, Cardinal Copia – later upgraded to Papa Emeritus IV – brought an undeniable sexual charge to Ghost performances. Combined with frequent references

"YOU HAVE TO GET USED TO BEING A FIGUREHEAD"

to "tickling your taint" – the particular activity beloved by Papa – and fan fiction that ranges from the sweetly innocent to the impressively profane, it's turned the masked frontman into an unlikely sex symbol. Did Tobias see that coming?

"Not at all," says Tobias. "Originally, I wanted the show to be all horror – Venom in 1982 meets Alice Cooper meets [early 80s Italian occult metal pioneers] Death SS, that whole thing. Which was very short-sighted of me! Ha ha ha!"

Whether it's linked or not, there's certainly a higher proportion of women at both nights at the Forum than at some metal shows. In the rows around *Hammer*'s seat, it looks to be at least a 50/50 split, maybe even skewed a little more to women over men. This has not gone unnoticed.

"We had Amon Amarth supporting us on this tour," says Tobias, and those guys were raving: 'Fuck, there's chicks at the show!" He laughs. "Which might be a little different to their usual sausage-fest."

Ghost's female fanbase may have been boosted by the TikTok success of *Mary On A Cross*, itself a gleeful mix of blasphemy and innuendo, as myriad creators got involved. But if the viral hit hasn't shifted the gender balance, it's certainly shifted the age balance.

"The whole TikTok thing has definitely attracted new fans, and those new fans are energetic," says Tobias. "It lends a slew of youth to the show. Some of them are so young that they don't have the preconceived notions that the older ones have – they don't know the bands who influenced me. They don't care about that stuff. Or maybe they're learning about it because they're interested in Ghost."

This newer, more youthful contingent of Ghost fans is in evidence at the LA shows. On the first night, a girl sits with her father a few seats behind *Hammer*. Wearing Papa-style make-up, she can't be much

Papa: sexy as fuck. It's official

Papa and co closed their US run with two nights at LA's 17,500-capacity Kia Forum

older than her early teens. When the lights go down and the *Imperium* intro begins to play, she lets out a series of shrill, ear-piercing screams that wouldn't sound out of place at an Olivia Rodrigo or BTS show.

There's an unexpectedly tender moment two-thirds of the way through the Forum shows when Papa suddenly materialises on a smaller, 'B' stage at the other end of the arena. He's accompanied by a different set of Nameless Ghouls: a pianist, two cellists and a backing vocalist clad in white. These are the Ghoulettes, and they're there to back him on a stirring cover of *If You Have Ghosts*, originally by troubled Texan garage rocker Roky Erickson and covered by Ghost themselves on 2013's *If You Have Ghost* (sic) EP.

The band have played this song live before, but not previously on this tour. At the song's conclusion tonight, Papa gives an impassioned, compassionate speech centred on mental health and personal happiness.

"Life is full of ups and downs – if you don't have the lows, you can't reach the highs," he concludes, sounding surprisingly paternal.

"Over the years, I've come to understand that a lot of our fanbase are, in one way or another, outsiders or that their lives are lonely or they're struggling with something," says Tobias a few days later. "It feels like there's a lot of hurt among our fanbase, and I want to address that. They've found a kind of belonging being in this group of Ghost fans."

Not everyone is onboard with the idea of such a community. Fans attending the band's show at St Louis' Hollywood Casino Amphitheater in August were ordered by the venue's security staff to remove any Papa-style make-up they were wearing. Tobias says he noticed that there weren't any made-up face in the audiences, but didn't make the connection until after the show.

"I was furious," he says, the annoyance still audible in his voice. "The story that I heard was that it was an initiative

PRESS/RYAN CHANG

Papa Goes To Hollywood

Tobias explains his connection to actor Patrick Wilson… and why he wants to appear in a costume drama

How did your collaboration with *Insidious* actor Patrick Wilson on this year's cover of Shakespears Sister's 90s hit *Stay* come about?
"He reached out to me regarding something completely different some time ago, which I didn't have time to do. But then he came back to me and said, 'I'm going to make *Insidious: The Red Door*. Do you have anything for me now?' We actually recorded *Stay* a few years ago, but we never released it because the song is a duet. He has a musical background – he was in [2004 movie] *The Phantom Of The Opera*. So I said, 'Would you like to do that?' And he went, 'Absolutely, and I'd love to sing it."

How did you get to know him? Is he a Ghost fan?
"He came to a show with his son, and I got to know him there. We have a lot in common, a lot of shared interests, one of which is an infatuation with the crafting of art – the actual work that goes into it. People know him as this great-looking actor, but he's a very driven, productive person who does many different things."

What about you? Would you like to act?
"I would love to. Sometimes when I look at films or TV series, I see a role and think, 'I could do that.' I guess comedy and scary are more in my wheelhouse, but I wouldn't be afraid to do something that was more drama. I'd love to do the kind of acting where I'm totally not myself – change the hair, the physique, play a really mean type or a total loser. I would love to do costume drama."

What, like *Pride And Prejudice*?
"Yeah, stuff like that. Or a trial film – playing a lawyer or a prosecutor. I'd love to do a movie where you get to go around in corridors and talk a lot."

You basically act with Ghost, onstage and in the videos. Have you had any acting training?
"No, I'm just making it up. All of this stems from having a big brother. When I was really young and he was still living at home, him and his friends would bring home their girlfriends, and I liked to clown around and do stupid things because they laughed and thought I was funny. I loved how they were entertained."

Fire, but hopefully no brimstone at the LA shows

PRAISE BE!

taken by some of the security people, who didn't approve of the band. They didn't like what we were doing so they wanted to be mean to these kids, and those kids were really, really upset with that. They told them it was a band requirement. That was upsetting to me. We would *never* ask that of our fans. We want them to dress up, we want them to come and have fun."

Have you got used to being a figurehead for those fans?

"I have gotten used to it, yes," he says. "You need to get used to it if you have people listening to you. The first album [2010's *Opus Eponymous*] was written just to entertain myself. When I noticed that people were listening, I thought, 'If they're listening, you better fucking lead them to a good place.' Not that I think everything I say is important. I prefer to do it via creating something that people can enjoy, rather than preaching to them."

Proof of Ghost's impact over the last 10 years is evident in other ways. In the wake of their success, a series of bands have emerged who hide their faces behind masks and wrap their real identities in a cloak of anonymity: Sleep Token are the most high-profile, but there's also black metallers Gaerea, UK doomsters Sermon and several others. None of them sound like Ghost, but the presentation is very familiar. Does Tobias ever look at them and think, 'Get your own idea!'?

"Well, I wasn't the first either, so I can't say that," he replies. "But yeah, there's been an uptick in anonymous bands and anonymous artists where the big selling point is, 'No one knows who they are.' [Dryly] Oh, OK, cool. But I'm not one to throw stones here. OK, great, if you want to do that, that's all good."

Is it flattering?

"Yeah, it is, I guess. I know it's also a gimmick, the same way it was for us. In a way, people think, 'If we add this [masked] component, this might fast-track us from nothing to something.' But what I've noticed from seeing a lot of artists doing it, is that it doesn't necessarily have the same impact as it did for us or for Slipknot or The Residents or whoever."

"THE SENTIMENT THAT ROCK IS DYING IS SIMPLY NOT TRUE"

Ever since the release of *Infestissumam* in 2013, Ghost have operated on an identifiable cycle: album, tour, EP, big reveal, new Papa. The two Forum shows come towards the end of the *Impera* cycle, and there's a sense of anticipation that something momentous could happen on the second night. The band themselves seemed to play into the idea, with the most recent entry in their *Ghost Chapter* video skits dropping some big hints that Papa Emeritus was not long for this world.

Except things didn't pan out like that. Three days after the LA shows, it appears that rumours of Papa's demise have been greatly exaggerated. He made it through both shows unscathed. At least for now.

Still, when *Hammer* speaks to Tobias, the Re-Imperatour isn't quite finished. There are a handful of shows to play in South America and Australia. By the time you read this, Ghost will have wrapped it up with a gig in Brisbane on October 7. Is Papa Emeritus IV going to be killed off at that show?

"I can't tell you that," replies Tobias. "As always with Ghost, there will be something happening, but it's not

PRESS/RYAN CHANG

Papa has a little message for the doubters

Sooooo many plans up these sleeves!

"THERE WILL BE A CHANGE BEFORE THE NEXT ALBUM"

a given that it's going to happen there and then. But at some point between now and when the next album comes, there will have been a change."

You're not going to say what that change is, are you?

"No."

What he will reveal is that the ball is already rolling on the follow-up to *Impera*.

"I've started writing a few songs, and as soon as I get home, I'm off for a few days and then I'm going to go into a studio and start working."

He's thinking ahead to future tours, too. Not just what he can do in terms of presentation – "I'd love to have a stage set with more integration, more lifts, more effects in it" – but where he can present it as well. Rammstein's leap from arenas to stadiums has been inspiring, he says, as has the next-level stage set that has accompanied it. Are Ghost planning to make a similar jump?

"We're working on it," he says, albeit with a note of caution in his voice. "There's a process of growing. We're looking at things that are two, three years ahead of time, so it's a very long time away. We don't know if it's going to pan out yet. You can still make it. It's hard – as hard as it's ever been – but you need to put a lot of effort into it. But the sentiment that rock is dying, and that bands can't become big anymore, that's simply not true."

Tobias formed his first band, the black metal outfit Absurdum, in 1994. He was still in his early teens, though he'd been listening to metal since he was a young kid, thanks to his older brother, Sebastian (who sadly died in 2010, on the same day that Tobias uploaded the very first Ghost songs to MySpace). He's clearly come a long way since then, but what would the young, black metal-loving Tobias Forge think of the Tobias Forge of 2023?

"He'd be in awe," he says without hesitation. "That boy is blown away. I know that because I'm carrying him with me all the time. He's always here, we're communicating. I occasionally see it through his eyes, and I think, 'Wow, I can't believe we're here, I can't believe we're playing with Metallica, or I can't believe I'm playing the Forum.' That's all so far away from those days, but then I'm sort of still doing the same things as he did, I'm still interested in the same things as he was. I'm the same person."

If Tobias could talk to that younger version of himself, or even the one who launched Ghost on an unsuspecting and largely oblivious world a decade-and-a-half later, he would have one piece of advice: "Go with your gut feeling."

Going with his gut feeling has served Tobias and Ghost well over the past 13 years, and it looks to continue serving them well for the foreseeable future. The music has become more popular, the gigs bigger, the ideas grander and more ambitious. The two Forum shows are merely the latest points on a trajectory that has been rising steadily for the last 13 years. During that time, there have been no trips, no stumbles, no steps backwards.

"Not yet," says Tobias. "That trajectory is not going to go up, up, up forever. There's going to come a point where we hit a ceiling. We haven't done so yet, but I'm just being realistic. On the other hand, I'm a dreamer. I'm just going to run and run until I can't run anymore."

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RESIDENTS

EVIL

Skulls! Blood! Pugs?! Here's what happened when Satanic Doo-Wop innovators Twin Temple invited us round for a spooky night at their LA home

WORDS: STEVE APPLEFORD • PICTURES: TRAVIS SHINN

We have been instructed to arrive at Twin Temple's home after dark. Located in a quiet residential neighbourhood in Los Angeles, the old house sits behind tall hedges, its outer walls painted black. A metal art deco bat watches over the porch and funereal lace covers the windows. After a knock on the door, we meet singer Alexandra James. "Welcome to the crypt," she says with an inviting smile, fake (we assume) blood trickling from her lips.

The singer lives here with husband Zachary, her life partner in art and magick. As Twin Temple, they make what they call 'Satanic Doo-Wop', a loving throwback to classic girl group rock'n'roll with genuine demonic overtones. Tonight, they will lead *Metal Hammer* on a tour of their carefully curated 1895 Victorian home.

They're a perfectly matched couple, dressed in black rodeo suits stitched with ornamental designs of glittery red and white pentagrams and daggers. Zachary's short hair is slicked back, while Alexandra's is piled high into a 60s-era beehive.

"I gotta have somewhere to hide my knives, you know?" Alexandra says with a laugh.

Since releasing their first single as Twin Temple in 2017, the twangy guitar pop of *Let's Hang Together*, the singer and her guitarist mate have explored their dual obsessions with Satan and a particular moment in Los Angeles pop music history – almost exclusively from 1962 to 1965, as played by the musical gunslingers and session players of The Wrecking Crew. (That collective included virtuosos like drummer Hal Blaine, bassist Carol Kaye and arranger Jack Nitzsche, who were the frequently uncredited force behind some of the biggest pop hits of the 60s, from The Ronettes to The Monkees.) Twin Temple's newest album, *God Is Dead*, is likewise a romantic journey through black magic and sexual healing, with self-explanatory songtitles like *Let's Have A Satanic Orgy* and *Burn Your Bible*.

At home, their hardwood floor is stalked by Ziggy, a 14-year-old pug, who seems unbothered by all the bones and demonic symbols. In the living room and dining area, he waddles beneath an impressive collection of antiques gathered by Twin Temple, including an 18th-century Italian console table with satyrs carved into the wood, surrounded by chairs smothered with snarling griffins.

"We collect anything devilish," Alexandra explains, standing beneath a renaissance revival Victorian chandelier that once hung inside a castle in Germany.

From more recent history, Zachary pulls out a one-of-a-kind acetate of an unreleased mix of Dion's *Baby Let's Stick Together*, a 70s wall of sound recording produced by Phil Spector, with handwritten notes on the label. They also own an autographed copy of Spector's classic Christmas album, signed by the producer on the day he was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame in 1989. Over the decades, Spector made history as a pop music maestro, and was among the first to truly use the recording studio like an instrument, before earning a reputation as a madman for pulling a gun on John Lennon, Leonard Cohen and Dee Dee Ramone during recording sessions, threatening wife Ronnie, and later becoming a bizarre pariah in a fright wig convicted of murder.

"Ahh, I wish he didn't go out that way," laments Alexandra. "But he made a lot of magic."

Before Twin Temple bought this house in East LA, it was painted white and mint green, says Zachary, "so we made it a very cheerful black. I do love walking up to the black bay windows every morning – after our grave-digging expositions at night."

Their shared aesthetic is demonic Victorian layered with the influences of Hammer horror movies and the underground films of occultist Kenneth Anger.

Zachary and Alexandra in their home studio, where they make beautifully evil music together

"WE'RE THE BEST SINNERS ON THE BLOCK"

ALEXANDRA JAMES

"I feel like all the best occult rituals went down in the 60s in Victorian houses," says Alexandra.

On a table are portraits of the Twin Temple duo made from tintypes, an early photographic process popular in the 19th century, giving them an ancient look of vampires passing through the ages.

They have a weakness for vintage taxidermy, so their home is decorated with the remains of various "Saturnian creatures" – goats, baboons, etc. There is a stuffed peacock and a very old dead parrot, and a stand where a mongoose is frozen in battle with a cobra. A real zebra skin decorates the hardwood floor, right beside a collection of beloved vinyl – records by Spector and occult rarities such as the 1971 eponymous double-LP *Barbara, The Gray Witch* and Alex Sanders' 1970 album *A Witch Is Born*.

All the taxidermy is from the era before widespread acknowledgement of endangered species, when captains of industry regularly hunted big game and brought home the skins and mounted heads to decorate their mansions. Despite Alexandra and Zachary's collection of knives and skulls, the idea of actually killing any living creature is of no interest to Twin Temple. They even tried vegetarianism, though it didn't take. Like many of us, the couple remain inherently carnivores, but real human flesh is not on the menu.

Along one wall is a collection of small post-mortem photographs – ancient portraits of children and adults posed after their deaths as grim mementos for grieving survivors.

"These are my children. I especially like the babies," says Alexandra. "They're so beautiful, their tiny coffins." She points to one of the pictures and says, "These are triplets

Ziggy doesn't seem at all fazed by his parents' eclectic tastes

who passed away," and she reads the names written on the back: Bessie, Essie and Jessie.

Specific details about Twin Temple's new neighbourhood in East LA are confidential, a necessity after their previous home became a magnet for Christian extremists when they were 'exposed' by hothead and far-right propagandist Alex Jones. That led to online death threats and insane accusations that the couple were killing babies. They left their mid-century house in LA's Silver Lake neighbourhood after finding this rare Victorian gem.

That experience fed the theme of *God Is Dead*, which is painstakingly period-correct to the early 60s, based on obsessive study of vintage studio logs, out-of-print books, recording sessions, manuals and interviews. Twin Temple do own some vintage gear, including a 1964 Fender Jaguar guitar and a couple of mid-60s Fender amps, but the duo are believers in the ability of modern tech to recreate the sound and feel of old recordings they love. The album title, Alexandra adds, is about "imagining a world post-God".

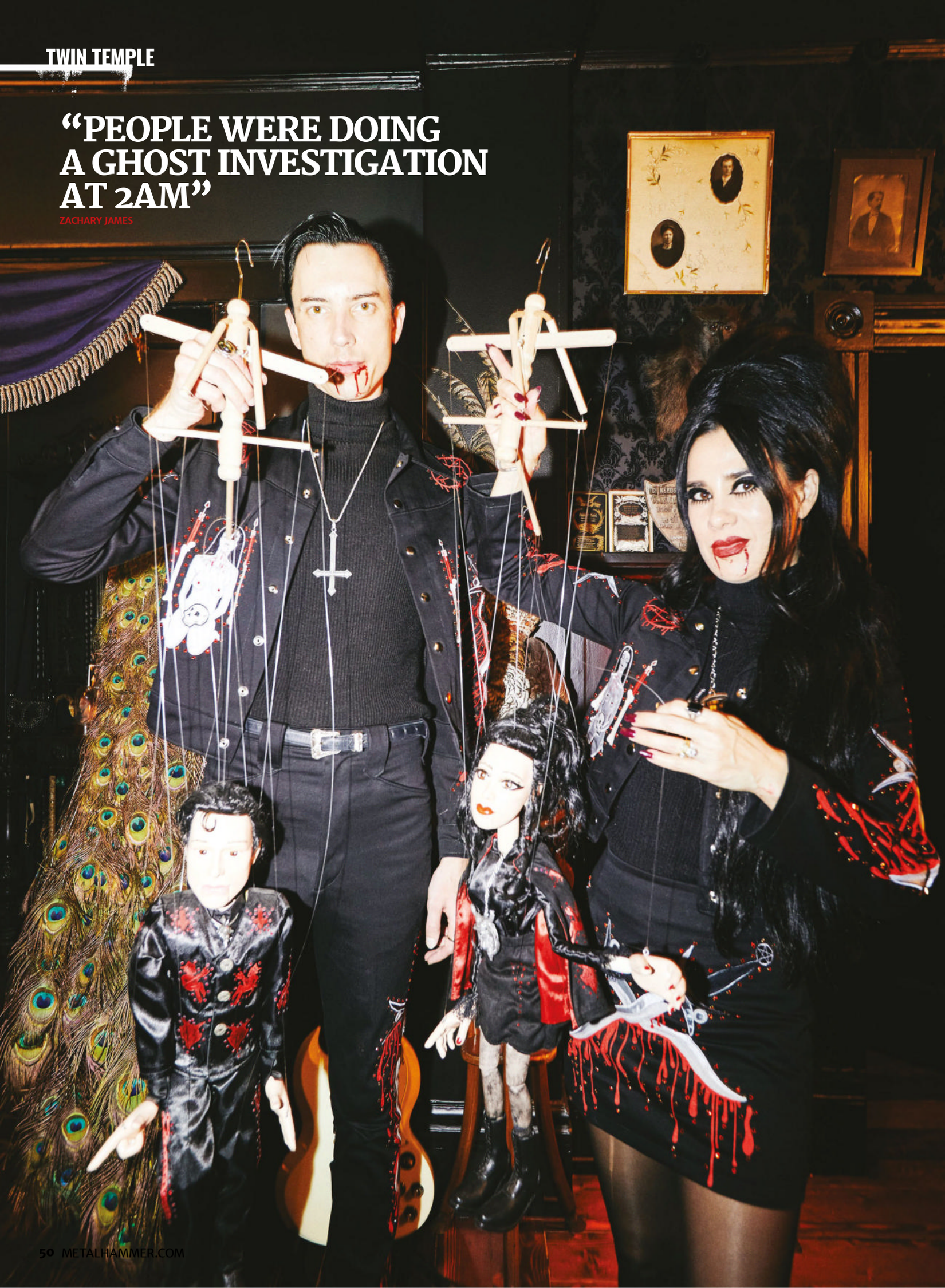
"After all the relentless death threats and moralising and harassment, we were just like, 'You want to harass us over who we are? Then we're going to double down on that.' In a lot of ways, we really made it like our blasphemy record," Alexandra explains. "The blasphemous themes are definitely more in your face. If you're going to harass us, then let's just be the best sinners on the block."

To their surprise, the music on their debut album, 2019's *Twin Temple (Bring You Their Signature Sound... Satanic Doo-Wop)*, found an audience waiting for it.

"We were 100% positive that this would not be successful because it's so bizarre," she says. "The funny thing is that once we made something we were positive nobody else

"PEOPLE WERE DOING A GHOST INVESTIGATION AT 2AM"

ZACHARY JAMES



See? A perfectly ordinary couple... nothing to see here... move along

would like, then other people started being like, 'Hey, I'm into this too.' And we're like, 'Really?'"

Metal fans, punks and other listeners were drawn to their devilish doo-wop, along with various factions of Satanists, who don't always get along but find common ground at Twin Temple shows. They now share management with Ghost, Slayer, Mastodon and Gojira, and recently spent a year on the road with Ghost playing arenas in the UK, US and Europe.

"They let us just be feral," says Alexandra of their new reps, Rick Sales Entertainment Group. "We really needed people who would just let us be ourselves."

On their last tour headlining the US, Twin Temple began hosting meet and greet events with fans. This year, they are offering a 'satanic baptism' for a coven of 10 people at a time.

"We wanted to do something a little more evil. Let's baptise people in the name of the Dark Lord!" says Alexandra with a laugh. "We're going to do a mini-ritual for people."

At one show, they officiated a wedding – just one more in an ongoing life of rituals onstage and off in their life together.

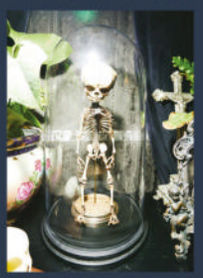
HOUSE OF HORRORS

Twin Temple's home is like a lovingly curated museum, and these are some of their favourite ghoulish artefacts

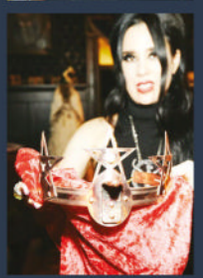
TWIN TEMPLE PUPPETS
When the pandemic paused touring, Twin Temple held a puppet show! In December 2020, they hosted Twin Temple Presents: A Magickal Tale of Krampus Night, a streaming event starring marionettes of themselves made in the Czech Republic. "It was such a sad time, we just wanted to bring people joy," says Alexandra.

MR. CROWLEY 7-INCH
Occultist Aleister Crowley died before the rise of rock'n'roll, but he's had a lasting influence on everyone from Ozzy to Jimmy Page. This rare 1975 disc features the master's voice reading poems *Pentagram* and *La Gitana*, with a B-side of acid rock by Chakra. "I think there's only a couple hundred of these," says Zachary.

RONNIE SPECTOR PHOTO
In Twin Temple's beloved home studio, no decoration is more inspirational than the autographed glossy of 60s hitmaker Ronnie Spector. It was a birthday gift from Zachary to his wife. "I love her so much," Alexandra says. "She's the original bad girl of rock'n'roll. All these dudes could learn a thing or two from her."



ROSE
Rose is a full-term baby skeleton displayed prominently under glass. Like the full adult skeleton, Charles, she is a beloved member of their household. Unfortunately, they can't take any of their lovely bones on tour. "I would bring the human skulls on the road, but they're unfortunately illegal in a few US states," says Zachary.



RITUAL IMPLEMENTS
The couple use custom-made tools during their rituals. There's Zachary's rainbow wand, hand-painted by the guitarist; a copper replica of Crowley's Egyptian Uraeus serpent crown; a devilish version of the Christian aspergillum to sprinkle unholy water; and Alexandra's Babylon-inspired chalice. "There's private stuff and there's the stage stuff," she explains.

"If there's two things that we're trying to keep alive, it's classic American rock'n'roll and magick and the occult," says Alexandra. "I'm not trying to proselytise or convert people, but I want to carry on that conversation. We'll die for this shit."

We're standing in the dining room when the couple introduce us to a full human skeleton named Charles, who in life was once a patient at what was then London's Bethlem Royal Hospital, aka 'Bedlam', a horrific psychiatric hospital "where our expression 'total bedlam' comes from now because of their deranged practices in the hospital," Alexandra says. Charles clearly didn't make it out of Bedlam alive. His skeleton was used later for rituals at a Masonic lodge, she explains, and traces of black candle wax can be seen on his bones.

"Then he came to us. He's got his own personality for sure."

On the wall above Charles's skull hangs an old painting the couple found in Florence depicting the Devil hovering over a nude Venus reclining blissfully.

"It is a portrait of us," suggests Zachary.

While their house is somewhat secluded behind tall hedges, neighbours have noticed the young couple next door. Some keep their distance.

"I think they're a little weirded out by us," Zachary offers. "They're a little wary of the neighbours who moved in and painted the house black. We did move Charles in at night intentionally because we thought it was appropriate – you can't bring in a skeleton in the middle of the day."

In the guest house out back, Twin Temple have built a cosy recording studio, with walls decorated with guitars and artefacts from their other interests: a framed *Time* magazine cover from 1972 announcing 'The Occult Revival' and lobby cards from the 1968 horror film *The Devil Rides Out* (released as *The Devil's Bride* in the States). Among Zachary's prized possessions is a coffee mug that reads 'Back to Mono', honouring the classic sound of early rock and pop records. All Twin Temple recordings are released in mono.

"This is where we make records sound like they're done at Gold Star with 100 people," explains Zachary, referring to a now-defunct studio made famous by Spector and The Beach Boys, "but we do it in here, one instrument at a time."

This studio is one of the couple's favourite spaces, and they sometimes spend 12 hours a day working on music. There's also a well-stocked library, with volumes on the occult and a Victorian copy of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, but it's currently crowded with gear for a tour with Danzig just days away.

Walking through the garden out the back, Alexandra stops at her sarracenia, a pitcher plant that eats live prey, and sticks a finger in its mouth.

Hanging out with Charles. As housemates go, he's pretty quiet. No bother at all really

"WE THOUGHT IT WAS APPROPRIATE TO MOVE THE SKELETON AT NIGHT"

ZACHARY JAMES

"It has a sweet-smelling nectar, so it attracts bugs in here. And they get further and further and then once they get deep enough, they can't get back out and they die in there. Then the plant digests them. I love carnivorous plants."

This is their dream house, and they fully expect to stay for eternity, or at least until they fulfil their fantasy of one day trading up to take over Spector's old Pyrenees Castle, a nearby mansion where the notorious producer shot and killed actress Lana Clarkson in 2003. Spector's former home towers above the community of Alhambra like a scene from the Tim Burton film *Edward Scissorhands*, which depicted a castle surrounded by little residential houses. Alexandra just celebrated her birthday with a party there.

"There were definitely some people around 2am trying to do some ghost investigation near the site of Lana's death, and wandering upstairs, wondering which was his bedroom," recalls Zachary of their visit.

The idea of taking over the castle comes up more than once during our visit, and it's no surprise. It represents a grim sweet spot of pop music history, elegant architecture and murder – not unlike the balance of the beautiful and the bleak that fuels Twin Temple's blasphemous music and growing international following. At Spector's cursed mansion, the duo certainly recognise an ideal setting for their subversive rock'n'roll and magick, just like at their Victorian home.

"The grounds are just incredible," Zachary adds dreamily. "One day we'll paint the castle black."

***GOD IS DEAD* IS OUT ON OCTOBER 13**

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Crucifixes and stakes at the ready – horror-punk vampires Creeper have risen from the grave with the year's most brilliantly over-the-top album, *Sanguivore*

There Will Be Blood

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY • PICTURES: STEVE BRIGHT

There are parts of the 18th-century church where Creeper's Will Gould lives that he dare not venture into. Even though this former place of worship has largely been converted into flats, remnants of its previous function are still in evidence, and they give him the willies. There's the crypt, for starters.

"It's terrifying," says Will. "I refuse to go in there. I keep imagining that there's something really sinister in there. Or someone."

Then there's the mysterious area at the back of the church, which has been blocked off by a dividing wall with a door that remains permanently locked. Or at least it did until the other day, when Will found it open.

"It was pitch black in there, except for this big, stained-glass window with light coming from it," he says intently. "I swear it was the most haunted thing I've ever seen."

There's a double irony to this. Will was raised Catholic though he's a confirmed non-believer these days, so the combination of God and the supernatural should have no effect on him. Even more ironic is the fact that his band, horror-punks Creeper, have made a concept album that centres around the undead. Specifically vampires.

That album, *Sanguivore*, is a gloriously grandiose, deliciously decadent goth rock opera inspired by The Sisters Of Mercy, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, Glenn Danzig, Billy Idol, such iconic movies as *Interview With The Vampire, Let The Right One In, Leon, The Lost Boys* and cult VHS-era fang flick *Near Dark*, and – towering above it all – the late, great Jim Steinman, the mad genius behind Meat Loaf's *Bat Out Of Hell* and half a dozen of rock's most fevered phantasmagorias.

Restrained, it is not. Instead, *Sanguivore* – a word for someone who exists on blood in the same way as a carnivore exists on meat – has ambition dripping from the tips of its pointed teeth. It's the soundtrack to the greatest 1980s vampire movie never made: a tale of demon girls and murderous boys, of sex, death and redemption. In a world where – Ghost and a handful others aside – rock and metal's death-or-glory ambition seems to have shrivelled into a bloodless husk, Creeper have gone big, and damn the ridicule. *'Are you brave enough to dream?'* urges Will on *Sanguivore*'s opening track, *Further Than Forever*. Given the song itself is an outrageous, nine-minute Wagnerian death ride, he's answered his own question.

"I love the idea of building a world around your music, making it more than just someone standing on a stage," says Will. "That's what's exciting to me. If you're unsatisfied with reality, build your own."

Hannah Greenwood: keyboards, violin, backing and co-lead vocals

It's an uncharacteristically sunny day in Manchester when *Hammer* meets Will in a just-the-right-side-of-hipster bar in the city's Northern Quarter. Late Joy Division singer Ian Curtis, who took his own life in 1980 at the age of 23, stares down austerely at us from a mural on the wall. With his black hair, black jeans, black Sisters Of Mercy T-shirt and just enough make-up to ensure he passes as human, Will looks like a mortuary assistant on dress-down Friday.

We'll stay in this pub for several pints, as the conversation wanders through everything from Will's fascination with UFOs ("Do I believe in them? That's a such complicated question") to his love of stage magic and illusion ("I was a little loner when I was a kid, so I taught myself how to do card tricks"). When we're done here, we'll head off to another pub for several more pints and a monster hangover the next morning. Right now, though, he's talking vampires.

"It's a place where outsiders live," he says of the mythology that surrounds these nocturnal blood-drinkers. "When you feel like you don't really fit in somewhere, or the people don't understand you, or you're getting hit in the face for wearing a hoodie or being a dirty grunger, it's a world to escape to."

Sanguivore leans body and soul into that mythology. It's centred around two immortal vampire lovers, Spook and Mercy – the former a man in his mid-30s, the latter a younger-looking girl who is way, way older and who converted her companion to undeath.

"She's the most vicious one of the two," Will explains. "The story is him trying to remind her what life was like before she became such a killer. It's a love story, but not in the traditional sense. It's about co-dependency."

The vampire chic extends to the presentation. Creeper have hit the dressing-up box hard, this time decking themselves out in black leather jackets, party-after-dark sunglasses, fangs and fake(?) blood. It's a look that's been cribbed wholesale from *Near Dark*, the 1987 movie about a gang-cum-family of vampire outlaws criss-crossing the American mid-west in a battered, blacked-out RV, with Will adopting the nom de vampire William Von Ghould for full effect.

"We don't just wear our influences on our sleeves," he says proudly. "We've made them into our jackets."

It's impossible to talk about *Sanguivore* without mentioning Jim Steinman, the man who conceived, wrote and orchestrated Meat Loaf's 1977 debut album *Bat Out Of Hell*.

Will Gould: lead vocals

Today, 46 years after it was released, that album is viewed as a kind of kitsch relic, a bombastic classic rock blow-out performed by a big man in a frilly shirt. Yet that does a disservice to the scale of what kindred outsiders Steinman and Meat Loaf achieved. Initially ridiculed by both the record industry and the media, *Bat Out Of Hell* went on to sell more than 40 million copies. Today, its devilishly funny mix of hard rock, musical theatre and blood-and-thunder drama is the benchmark for any band that dares to dream.

"VAMPIRISM SIGNIFIES A REBIRTH"

WILL GOULD

"There was one album I always saw near my dad's record player with this amazing cover with this bike erupting out of the gates of Hell, with this giant fucking bat thing behind it," says Creeper guitarist Ian Miles, speaking to *Hammer* from home via Zoom, a few days after we meet Will. "I was like, 'That's cool as shit.' And I listened to it, and this whole world opened up. This musical Narnia that took me on all kinds of adventures."

It's hard to overstate just how much Will Gould and Ian Miles love Jim Steinman – not just his work with Meat Loaf, but the towering, wedding-cake production he brought to the Sisters Of Mercy (especially their staggeringly OTT 1987 single *This Corrosion*), gravel-throated 80s soft rock queen Bonnie Tyler and long-forgotten all-female group Pandora's Box. They especially venerate Steinman's 1981 solo album *Bad For Good*, a flawed masterpiece made when he and Meat Loaf were in the middle of one of their periodic spats. When Ian got married to his (now-ex) wife, Will gave him a lighter engraved with the words 'Bad For Good' as a wedding present. "We're just Jim Steinman nerds," says Ian.

They found a kindred spirit in *Sanguivore* producer Tom Dalgety (Ghost, Opeth). Like the band, Tom loves music that's larger-than-life and full of character generally, and Jim Steinman's music specifically. Coincidentally, or maybe not, he also lives in an old church. It was a marriage made in Heaven. Or Hell. Or wherever doomed vampire couples live.

"When you sit down and listen to *Bat Out Of Hell* or *Bad For Good*, you enter a world that someone has created in their own heads that turned into something real," says Ian. "That's what we wanted to do with *Sanguivore*."

Will Gould describes Ian Miles as "my best friend". The pair have known each other since their mid-teens, when they were both involved in the south coast DIY punk scene, albeit in different bands. Ian says his future bandmate's sense of showmanship was intact even back then.

"He'd do things where, if you turned up to one of his gigs in a white shirt and black tie, you'd get in for half price," says Ian. "It wasn't very punk rock, but it was very Will. He's a man who never lacks an idea. He's got stuff flowing out of his brain constantly."

The pair began playing together in 2010, when Ian left his hardcore band, Take Em Out, to join Will's group, Our Time Down Here. OTDH split three years later, with a farewell show at their local venue, The Joiners in Southampton.

In Will's eyes, the rock scene back then was depressingly desolate. "Oh, fuck yeah," he says. "Everybody was just standing there onstage. Emo had died a death, and I missed it: 'Where have all the feathers and frills gone from rock'n'roll?'"

He decided to do the only sensible thing, which was to start a new band who would put ambition at the centre of everything they did.

"I wanted to reinvent the entire thing every time, just smash all of the pieces and start again," says Will. "I think by my own nature, I have a really short attention span."

That sense of restless ambition was evident from the start. Creeper's debut album, 2017's *Eternity, In Your Arms*, put a melodramatic and very British spin on the kind of goth/punk/emo hybrid that My Chemical Romance had struck gold with a decade earlier. That desire to be bigger than everything else extended to their live show. As part of a show at London's Boston Music Room just prior to the release of *Eternity, In Your Arms*, Creeper held a funeral parade for the old songs they were never going to play again. More spectacularly, they wrapped up the *Eternity...* campaign with a show at London's Koko, which concluded with Will announcing that it would be their last ever gig, prompting a genuine explosion of shocked emotion in the crowd (it was his ultimate homage to David Bowie, who did exactly the same thing with his Ziggy Stardust character in 1973). More recently, they concluded the campaign for their second album, 2020's *Sex, Death & The Infinite Void*, with a show at London's Roundhouse that culminated in Will being decapitated onstage.

"We never want to just go onstage and play music – there needs to be something else to it," he says. "Jesus Christ, there's only so many times you can see someone wandering onstage in the clothes they were wearing to go shopping in Tesco that morning."

Sex, Death & The Infinite Void lived up to Will's promise that the band would reinvent themselves every time. It drew on Bowie-esque early 70s glam rock and late 90s Britpop, resulting in an album that was visually and musically brighter than its predecessor. But it also came close to finishing Creeper off.

Today, Will half-jokingly describes *Sex, Death & The Infinite Void* as "cursed". He reels off everything that went wrong: people connected with the band losing friends and family members, the record plant that pressed the album burning down, the financial hit they took when their tour was cancelled due to Covid.

That the album even came out at all was a triumph in itself. As they were working on it, Ian was in the middle of a severe mental breakdown. He began hearing voices and suffering paranoid delusions that he was a member of a revolutionary underground cult. It was so serious that he ended up spending five weeks in a psychiatric ward.

Left to right: Sean Scott (bass, backing vocals), Jake Fogarty (drums, percussion), Ian Miles (guitars, backing vocals)

"Will was there when the ambulance came," says Ian. "He was actually one of three people restraining me."

Today, Ian can look back on that tumultuous part of his life with some clarity. "I'm in a much better place, I've just finished up all my therapy, I'm in a new relationship," he says. "I went through something horrible and traumatic, and sometimes you need to shed your skin."

Despite Will's understandable concern for his best friend, Ian's state of mind during and after his episode couldn't help but impact on the band.

"We hit a rough patch," says Ian. "It was definitely a product of difficult times. We were both struggling to process it. We had to be pretty open and honest with each other – probably the most honest we've ever been. It was painful at times."

"It felt at times like an impossible task to put the train back on the tracks again," adds Will, who spent several months finishing off *Sex, Death & The Infinite Void* on his own in Los Angeles while his friend recovered. "There were definitely times when it looked like the band didn't exist anymore."

There's a point to bringing up such a difficult subject. Ian's journey back to the place where he is today partly shaped

"THERE WERE TIMES WHEN THE BAND DIDN'T EXIST ANYMORE"

WILL GOULD

Sanguivore. Sure, the album is a blood-splattered vampire love story set to an epic soundtrack, but there's a deeper, more personal meaning to it.

"It signifies a rebirth," says Will. "It was me and my oldest friend getting back into a room together after he had been very, very unwell. The idea of vampirism, of being revived and coming back from the dead, it's about the relationship between me and my oldest friend."

"I feel that all of the trauma that happened on the last record, all the shit we went through personally and as a band, was a death," says Ian. "It was the death of our old selves. This album is us coming back as vampires."

It's getting late in Manchester, and neither Will nor *Hammer* is sure how much time has passed or how many pints we've had. In both cases, it's a lot.

He's currently talking about how little time he has for much modern music.

"There's such a blueprint to it, and I find that a bit ghastly," he says, his candidness lubricated by alcohol. "I hear people telling me that something is 'groundbreaking'. And I just think, 'Jesus Christ, man…'"

He rolls his eyes in exasperation, but he's not done yet.

"Listen, I've been involved with the DIY punk scene my whole life, I'm a vegan, I like to think I'm a man of morals myself. But a lot of the time we value the message more than we do the art." He jabs the table. "That. Is. So. Boring."

Even now, the part of him that loves the mythology and romance of rock'n'roll can't help but push back against the mundanity of the music industry and what's expected from modern bands. "I've had some very miserable conversations about TikTok and 'content'," he says. "I find it all so depressing, but it's what you have to do."

In the eyes of both Will and Ian, Creeper's most important achievement is the community they've built – those misfits and lost souls drawn like moths to a lightbulb. They're the ones who are immersed in the world – or worlds – created by the band, the ones who are distraught when their idols pretend-announce they're splitting up onstage, who follow them whatever dark, vampiric path Creeper lead them down.

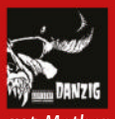
This could partly be because Will recognises himself in them. As "a young, queer kid" growing up, he was drawn to rock'n'roll's outsiders: David Bowie, Morrissey, Marilyn Manson ("The accusations against him are horrible, but

Fangs, Murder & Rocky Horror

Will talks us through the inspirations behind Creeper's *Sanguivore*

JIM STEINMAN: BAD FOR GOOD
"A huge influence on this record in terms of its scope and ambition. It's fantastic, it's larger than life, it's very homoerotic, the songs are insanely long, the music videos are outrageous. He can't sing like Meat Loaf, but that's what makes it authentic."

THE PHANTOM OF THE PARADISE
"It's this absolutely crazy 70s film by the director Brian De Palma about a phantom in a nightclub called The Paradise. It's very scary but very camp at the same time – it's really violent, but then they'll go into this over-the-top musical number. It sums up what we're doing on *Sanguivore*."



DANZIG: DANZIG
"People talk these days about how cool the Misfits were, but Danzig were way bigger. Glenn Danzig had reinvented himself from a punk rock guy into this dark, brooding, almost blues singer. And it's got *Mother* on it, which is brilliant."

THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW
"[Creator] Richard O'Brien pulled together this collective of freaks and weirdos, which I love. It started off onstage in London, but they made a film and it became this worldwide phenomenon. It was so important to me growing up - the make-up in our *Cry To Heaven* video is basically the floor show in *Rocky Horror*."

THE SISTERS OF MERCY: FLOODLAND
"Jim Steinman did three songs on this, which are as magnificent as you'd imagine, but the rest of the record is weird and dark and strange. They were another band who reinvented themselves every time as well. And [singer] Andrew Eldritch is a prick, but what would rock music be without pricks?"

THE DAMNED: A NIGHT OF A THOUSAND VAMPIRES
"This was the show The Damned, who I love, did at the Palladium in London. Everyone had to come dressed as a vampire - they were going for the Guinness World Record for the most vampires in one place. And [singer] Dave Vanian shaved his head halfway through the show. That's commitment!"

"IF YOU'RE UNSATISFIED WITH REALITY, BUILD YOUR OWN"

WILL GOULD

I can't deny the influence those early records had on me"). He remembers putting on his mum's make-up when she was out in attempt to look like early-70s Bowie.

"Rock'n'roll is so camp and over the top, it's always been something that's been part of me," he says. "Bowie being a bisexual icon was a huge deal for me. I'm bisexual, but for the first half of my life, I wasn't really open about it. Over the course of doing a band, it's allowed me to become more open."

He says he's met many queer and trans Creeper fans who have told him how important the band are to them.

"I'm so proud of being part of their lives, part of the soundtrack of them growing up too. The fact that they've found a safe space in us, it kind of completes that circle a little bit for me.

"If we're good at anything, it's creating a space where people feel really comfortable to be themselves, because we didn't have that when I was younger. I want all of this to lead to somewhere where people can come to, a kingdom people can enter."

He smiles. It looks like there's a flash of fang, or maybe that's just the fading light. "People like me." H

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"MAN, IT'S

Dangerous medical complaints and
And now they've invited fans into

WORDS: MATT MILLS
PICTURES: JAKE OWENS

HOT IN HERE!"

exhaustion can't keep Trivium off the road. their dressing room as part of the Pig Pen

"*Metal Hammer* are writing an article about this!" Corey Beaulieu announces with a grin. The Trivium guitarist and his three bandmates are in a dressing room at Cambridge's Corn Exchange, addressing the eight fans crammed in here with them.

Welcome to the Pig Pen, an up-close-and-personal VIP experience where a tiny handful of Trivium diehards can witness their heroes jam out a mix of rare and requested songs before the main show starts. For the £170 ticket price, they also get access to a meet-and-greet with the Florida band, as well as a bundle of souvenirs to commemorate the occasion, from personal photos with bandmembers to a Trivium tea towel.

"I've always loved that 'fly on the wall' thing," bassist Paolo Gregoletto explains, as *Hammer* sit with him and Corey on the band's tourbus a couple of hours before the Pig Pen experience kicks off. "I love watching bands warm up. Metallica used to let you see their tuning room [by putting videos of it on YouTube], working on a song they'd play later that night. For us, it was like, 'How do we make that our own?' Instead of just warming up, how about we invite a couple people in and play songs we might not even play in the set that night? It'll be unique, with only a couple people hearing a song tonight in a jam room."

Although it's something they'd seen Metallica do for a decade, the idea of having a dedicated jamming room everywhere they go didn't come to Trivium until 2021. That year, straight after Covid-19 lockdown restrictions eased, they toured the States with Megadeth and saw that Dave Mustaine and co were doing it too.

It was a logical progression from there: Trivium brought an electric drum kit on tour so they could do it themselves, streaming the rehearsals on frontman Matt Heafy's hugely popular Twitch channel. At the start of 2023, they opened it up to friends and industry types in person.

"When we were in London [headlining the Hammersmith Apollo in January 2023], we had 60 people in the Pig Pen, just from magazines and record labels," Corey remembers. The guitarist laughs: "It looked like they were having more fun in the Pig Pen than at the actual show! They were seeing something that they don't usually get to see."

This tour, which kicks off tonight, is the very first time they've thrown the Pig Pen's metaphorical doors open to the public. Given the reaction from the small yet intense crowd, this tour won't be the last where it happens.

In August, Matt Heafy gave an interview at the Summer Breeze festival in Germany.

"This time, when this tour cycle ends, we're gonna take a true break," he said. They had no plans to write or record a new album, and would instead use the time to work on their studio, The Hangar, in Orlando.

Spending time with Trivium, you can tell this is a band who've been going hard on the road. For starters, there's Paolo: the bassist realised shortly after flying from the USA to Germany at the start of the tour that he had a hernia and would need emergency surgery as soon as possible. He was replaced by Malevolence's Josh Baines during the first week of shows and, tonight, his bass is on a stand both in the Pig Pen and onstage so he doesn't injure himself by lifting it.

"When I went to the hospital, they told me I had a hernia that was potentially dangerous since it could block my intestines," the bassist remembers. "They tried to push it in but it wouldn't go, so they said it was surgery time right away. I'm still getting kinda sore in my back and neck from just looking at the bass and playing in a set position."

Standing room only: well worth the ticket price

Corey and Alex kick things off

Matt is in fine voice... but not *too* much voice...

Matt is on vocal rest during the entire UK leg. He's not doing any interviews while he's over here, to try and preserve his voice during the last couple weeks of touring. Instead, we catch up with him via Zoom a couple of weeks later, when he's back in Florida.

"The first two-and-a-half weeks of the tour were disastrous for sleep," he says, looking back on the eventful start of this set of European dates. "We were up all day when we arrived [in Europe] then Paolo had to get emergency surgery. We played in Romania, finished the show, showered, got into a van at 1:15 in the morning and went on a three-and-a-half-hour van ride to the airport, where we stayed for five hours."

It's been this intense for nearly 20 years now. Since Corey and Paolo joined in 2003/2004, the band have reliably released albums within two-and-a-half years of each other and toured prolifically in between. Even as Covid put a stop to live music, the band put out *What The Dead Men Say* in April 2020 and then immediately re-entered writing mode,

In the Pig Pen, you just know the fans' internal monologues are basically, "SQUEAAAAAL!"

releasing follow-up *In The Court Of The Dragon* just 18 months later. This tour marks the second time they've played across Europe in 2023 alone, following a run with Heaven Shall Burn at the start of the year.

"We did three albums in five years," says Corey, referencing the period between *...Dragon* and 2017's *The Sin And The Sentence*. "We gave people so much music so quickly that there needs to be time in between."

"We were so young [in the early days of the band] that we basically came out of school right into touring," Paolo remembers. "Our college years were that."

This tour is notable for more than just the Pig Pen. It also sees them celebrating the 15th anniversary of their fourth album, *Shogun*. That record reaffirmed Trivium's position at the forefront of the 2000's metal scene. After the band broke through on 2005's *Ascendancy*, they lost a lot of support with follow-up *The Crusade*. Today, both Matt and Paolo call *Shogun* – with its technicality, monstrous hooks and thrashing, snarling heaviness – the album that *The Crusade* should have been.

"THE HOSPITAL TOLD ME I HAD A POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS HERNIA"

PAOLO GREGOLETTO

"If you listen to *The Crusade*, there were a lot of technical moments, but we didn't know how to combine all of it together," Matt explains. "There were some perfect songs for what that record was, like *Entrance Of The Conflagration*, but others like *Contempt Breeds Contamination* weren't fully realised because we weren't ready yet."

Safe to say, the Pig Pen is a great success

It's just gone 7:30pm on August 23 when *Hammer* steps into the Cambridge Pig Pen. After snaking through the labyrinthine corridors backstage at the 1,300-capacity Corn Exchange, we find Corey and drummer Alex Bent already there, half an hour before their tiny, tiny audience come in. Alex is perched on his electronic kit, crammed into the corner, while a bass is perched in a playable position on a stand a few feet away. It's only been three weeks since Paolo's hernia surgery.

Corey and Alex warm up with a medley of impromptu covers. They speed through Metallica's *Hardwired*, then jam the groovier Slayer cut *Skeletons Of Society* before Paolo steps in. They casually reinvent *Breaking The Law* as a thrash song, courtesy of added blastbeats from Alex, and play Sepultura classic *Roots* while frontman Matt Heafy arrives, setting up cameras for a Twitch stream of the intimate mini-set to come.

"Man, it's hot in here!" he says as fans file in, making this minuscule room even more unbearably sticky than it already was in the late-summer heat.

From the start, they deliver on Paolo's earlier promise of playing songs that won't appear in the main set later. The first track is *Insurrection*, a speed metal deep cut from

Trivium (left to right): Paolo Gregoletto, Alex Bent, Matt Heafy, Corey Beaulieu

Alex's electronic kit is great for the Pig Pen, but this... this is something else

2008's *Shogun*. Although the performance is instrumental and microphone-free – largely in order to save Matt's voice – the people in here prove their passion for the band by mouthing along to the song regardless. It's a response that Matt plays into during the following *Catastrophist*, playfully cupping his hand by his ear in encouragement.

Then comes another *Shogun* rarity, *The Calamity*, before Matt offers one fan the choice of what's played next. Anything's fair game, and they eventually pick *Forsake Not The Dream*. A jam of the latter half of *Torn Between Scylla And Charybdis* brings the Pig Pen to a close, after which comes photos and some brief socialising before the fans disperse into the main auditorium of the Corn Exchange.

"I can't put that into words!" Trivium megafan Arnie tells us right after the mini-set. He's a sound engineer who says the band inspired him to pursue his career. "Coming up to the Pig Pen and seeing one of my favourite bands up close was just such a good experience! I always said, if they do open up the Pig Pen to fans, that I would go and see it, because it'd be an experience I'd never forget. I got married two years ago and, to me, this was on par with that. Ha ha!"

Adding to the importance of the occasion is the fact that these UK dates have been announced as Trivium's last tour for quite some time.

"I was always going to see them on this tour," Arnie says, "because they're not touring again until, what, 2025?"

As his enthusiasm suggests, the Pig Pen is the perfect fan-facing experience. But there's another, financial dimension to it. Artists' touring profits have dropped through the floor since the pandemic, with venues taking merch cuts while bus companies gouge them amid the high demand. It's a lucrative way of offsetting some of the costs of tour, or even topping up the profits. But Corey denies that the Pig Pen was motivated by money.

"So many people were asking us how to be a part of it," he says. "So we were like, 'Well, if there's a fan demand for it, let's experiment!'"

Aside from Paolo's recent medical issues and the general wear and tear of a few years of heavy-duty touring, the band show no signs of wear and tear when they're actually onstage tonight. The opening *In The Court Of The Dragon* sounds ferocious, especially when Matt belts out that melodic chorus over Alex's barrage of blastbeats. When they take a five-song detour through *Shogun* material – *Kirisute Gomen, Torn Between Scylla And Charybdis, Down From The Sky, Of Prometheus And The Crucifix* and bonus track *Poison, The Knife Or The Noose* – for the album's 15th anniversary, they look as energised as they did in 2008.

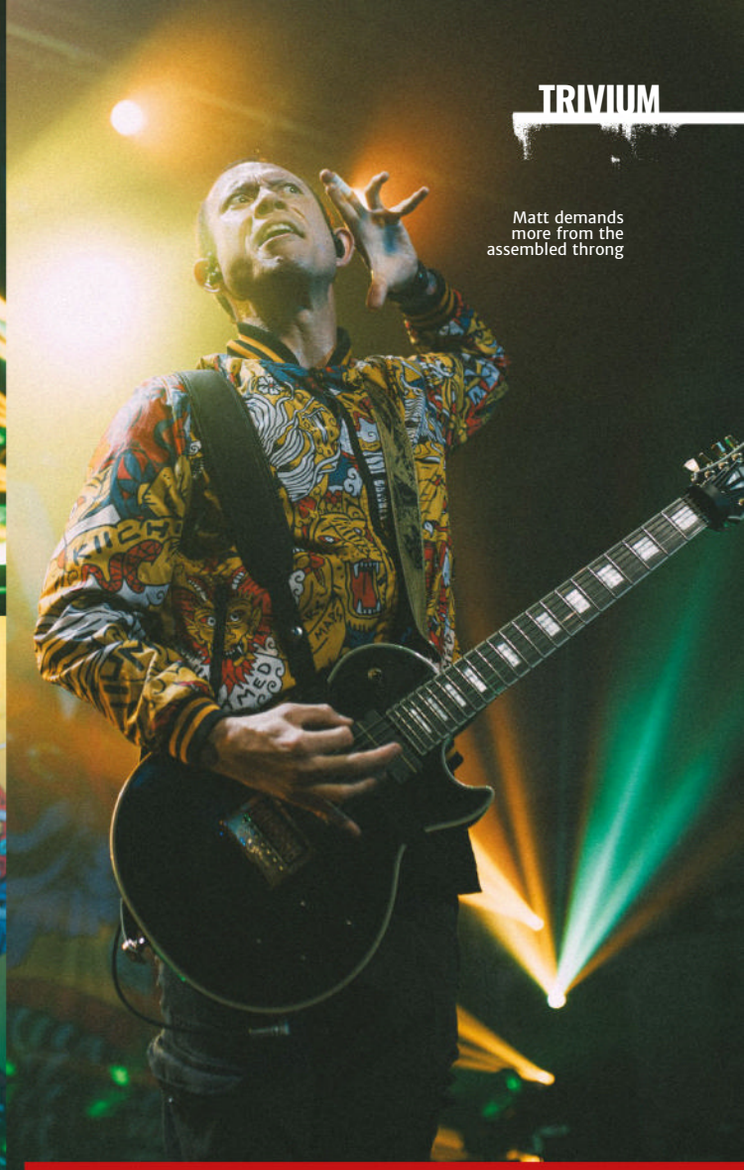
There's no clear consensus within the Trivium camp about how long the band will be away. While Paolo suggests that the break from touring could last at least six or seven months, Matt says it looks like the time off will be twice as long, "for 12 to 15 months", though that doesn't stop him from already teasing what's next.

He wants to further explore his Japanese-inspired black metal side-project, Ibaraki.

"I was able to meet Einar [Selvik] from Wardruna," he says, "and it's interesting how they're a Nordic folk project but feel like part of the black metal world. I think there

Paolo is still recovering from surgery, but he's powering through thanks to a cool bass stand

A victory salute from Corey



Matt demands more from the assembled throng

"THERE MIGHT BE SOMETHING TO ME LEARNING TRADITIONAL JAPANESE INSTRUMENTS"

MATT HEAFY

might be something to me learning traditional Japanese instruments and seeing what that sounds like."

He also teases that he'll be doing a couple of videogame soundtracks at the same time.

"I've got one main score that I'm working on right now. I can't say what game it is, but it's a childhood favourite of mine – and it's not *Doom*."

Towards the end of the Cambridge show, as the band prepare to storm through *A Gunshot To The Head Of Trepidation* and *In Waves*, Matt notes that *Gunshot…*'s parent album, *Ascendancy*, is turning 20 in 2025. "We should probably do something about that."

When we speak to him via Zoom a couple of weeks later, he gives a coy smile when the subject of anniversaries comes up.

"I always love to leave some kind of Easter egg that's very public, but I don't know what I'm saying," Matt says. "We'll have to see what that means."

***IN THE COURT OF THE DRAGON* IS OUT NOW VIA ROADRUNNER**

"IMAGINE A JAPANESE CHILDREN OF BODOM!"

Matt Heafy has been producing and managing a bunch of new metal bands. He gives us the lowdown…

RYUJIN
"They were called Gyze [see *Metal Hammer 348*], but we rebranded them Ryujin – imagine Samurai metal, a Japanese Children Of Bodom that uses Japanese instruments, sings in Japanese and has Japanese themes. Their guitarist and singer, Ryoji Shinomoto, is one of the most talented people I've ever met – he's an unbelievable virtuoso, as good as Alexi Laiho was at guitar, if not even better, which is crazy to say but it's true. He's an amazing singer, an amazing songwriter, he can sing in English or Japanese… He can do it all."

FROZEN SOUL
"Their record, *Glacial Domination*, just came out on Century Media, and it's absolutely phenomenal – it's my first production since Roadrunner United. Imagine a bunch of metal and hardcore kids playing a mixture of old-school Amon Amarth, old-school Bolt Thrower and old-school Obituary. It's terrifyingly heavy."

DYING ALONE
"I started managing and producing them earlier this year. I met their vocalist and main guitar player, Robin Junge, because he's one of the co-owners of a luxury watch brand Time Is Luxury, and I've been doing a lot of consultancy work and content creation in that world. They're influenced by Norwegian black metal and old-school thrash, and they have some amazing material."

DOWNFALL OF MANKIND
"They're a Portuguese modern metal band I'm helping out on all facets with."

THE HAMMER INTERVIEW

DAVE LOMBARDO

Cuban refugee, architect of thrash, restless musical maverick – these are the life and times of the man who gave Slayer their heartbeat

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

PRESS/EKATERINA GORBACHEVA

PAISTE

Dave Lombardo might have been the jackhammer heart of Slayer, but there's more to him than just thrash. If you really want to get his pistons pumping, you'll get him talking about industrial metal.

"When people were getting into nu metal and grunge, I ventured into the industrial scene and felt more at home there than anywhere else," he reveals today. "I just found bands like Nine Inch Nails, Laibach and Einstürzende Neubauten so exciting."

Born in Cuba in 1965 and fleeing with his family to the US as a toddler, he made his name in the 80s as one of the architects of thrash metal. Since then, his career has taken him down some weird and wonderful avenues, from providing the rhythmic attack for Suicidal Tendencies, Testament and Misfits to his collaborations with Mike Patton in Fantômas, Dead Cross and the resurrected Mr. Bungle. Forty years on from Slayer's debut album, *Show No Mercy*, he's busier than ever, playing in Biffy Clyro frontman Simon Neil's extreme metal side-project, Empire State Bastard, and releasing his very first solo album, instrumental drum solo showcase *Rites Of Percussion*. It's a wonder that he has time to talk, but we pinned him down for long enough to look back at the part he played in the birth of thrash, his rollercoaster relationship with Slayer and just what he thinks of Lars Ulrich's drumming.

Fantômas: beautifully batshit

"SLAYER WERE THE BEST BAND OF THE BIG 4"

What role did your Cuban heritage play in your upbringing?
"Major! I was two years old when we arrived in the US. We flew directly to California and hooked up with my brothers who had arrived five years earlier. Before I was born, my parents had sent them on this historical thing called the Peter Pan project, where parents sent their kids to foster homes in the US and the plan was they'd join them around six months later. Well, in that time the Cuban Missile Crisis happened and suddenly this wall went up – nobody was getting in or out, there was no communication, nothing. They couldn't see my brothers for five years and it really put a strain on the family."

Did your family ever discuss moving back?
"That was a big no-no. Dad was an entrepreneur and had owned three butcher shops in Cuba, but he lost it all to the Communist regime. They had just bought their house and had to give it up. Fifty-some years later, my wife and I took my mom, who was 83, back to Cuba in 2018 and we visited all the spots that had meant something to my family – my dad's markets, the apartments my mom grew up in, the house I'd been born in. We actually went inside; there were still bits of furniture that had been my parents'. It was a remarkable experience, and I'm very happy that before my mom passed I was able to take her there and talk to her about it."

Did you get into much trouble as a kid?
"A little, but not much. I'd DJ with my friend who was a couple years older. I was his sidekick, so I'd come home at, like, 4am and my mom would be waiting at the window, furious. She was like, 'If you come home at 4am when you're 13, by the time you're 18 you'll be in jail! If you keep doing this, I'll put you in military school!' I had no idea what that was, but it sounded *bad*. But then I found out the other kid I DJ'd with was actually *at* a military school, and the only issue he had was that he had to wear a military uniform, so it wasn't that bad."

Why did you take up drums?
"In fourth grade I was sent to this private school to get a better education. I found out they had a school marching band so asked if I could join. I was able to play the marching drums, then my dad brought me this little Pearl drum-set and I'd play along to records I'd get from a local store, because they sold all these 45s that I'd get for like 50 cents. Any song I liked from the radio, I'd write it down and then go shopping for it next time I was at the record store. Asking my dad for money was difficult, because we were very blue collar and he'd say, 'If you want money, get a job!' but I do think that's where my work ethic has come from."

What made you pick up speed, drumming-wise?
"There's some Cuban songs that have this certain drive and energy, and they're pretty fast. That's in my DNA. I think hyperactivity kicked in around puberty though, and suddenly everything I listened to was too slow. I'd seek out songs that had a faster, more exciting vibe and as I found bands to play in, I'd gravitate towards more hard rock songs and darker imagery. When I first saw [Iron Maiden mascot] Eddie, on the *Killers* cover, I knew I had to get that."

How did it figure into the kind of music you were playing?
"By the time I joined Slayer I'd already started enjoying playing the heaviest songs. But then punk came along – good ol' Jeff [Hanneman] comes in one day with his hair shaved off and says, 'I'm fuckin' punk now.' We couldn't believe it, but then he starts playing some of this music and it was like, 'Whoa, I *love* this'. After that, you'd hear a riff like *Living After Midnight*, but double the beat, and the passion for fast music went from there."

What are your memories of the very first Slayer gig?
"We knew we were good, and you could feel it in the energy when we got onstage. We had our own props, smoke machines… we'd build our own pyro! Rig these nails with copper wire and then plug them in so they'd explode and ignite some gunpowder we kept in steel pipes. Thank god there were no regulations – there was a lot of smoke and a lot of chaos in those early shows!"

PRESS/DUSTIN RABIN

Dead Cross: where thrash, punk and hardcore meet in a darkened alley

PRESS/BECKY DIGIGLIO

What's the craziest thing you ever saw at a Slayer gig?
"One of the craziest was when we travelled up to San Francisco, the thrash metal epicentre. The excitement was huge; we were playing with Exodus, and during their set people were climbing up the speakers and leaping off. There were two guys I remember, one was called Andy 'Airman' Anderson and the other's name escapes me, but they would literally walk on heads during shows. They'd run offstage and just see how far they could go until they'd sink and fall in. I'd never seen anything like that before. One time, a kid tried to jump off the balcony onto the stage, but landed feet-first and went through the stage. So his torso was sticking out, trying to wiggle out."

Was there any rivalry with other thrash bands in those early days?
"A friendly rivalry. We were competing, but not in a negative way. We wanted to be the best, we wanted to be the heaviest, the fastest. So our rivals were any band that'd open up for us – we'd be like, 'Let's blow 'em out the water!' I can't think of a single band we had a real negative relationship with."

When Slayer wrote *Angel Of Death*, the band were accused of being Nazis. Could you understand that?
"I couldn't, at all. People just seemed to be getting it all wrong and it didn't make sense to me; it's a song, and nowhere did it give off this idea that fascism was cool. Tom [Araya, frontman] was talking about this guy who performed these horrible surgeries on innocent people – really stupid, horrific things. You shouldn't need to read the lyrics to understand we weren't condoning those things."

You quit the band right as *Reign In Blood* came out, then rejoined a few months later. What happened?
"Back then, we didn't know! We knew things were getting better because we'd gone from travelling in a van to a bus, and having drum techs, lighting, engineers etc, but when we got home our so-called manager was telling us we'd broken even after playing all those shows… so I was just like, 'Fuck this, something's going on.' [Legendary producer] Rick Rubin was an integral part of bringing me back, though – he'd call me every day, 'What're you doing?' 'Nothing.' '*Exactly.* This band isn't the same without you.' Rick helped fund my return."

Did the rise of death metal make you up your game?
"Well, we'd watch a lot of those bands from side-stage anyway. I remember whispering to Hanneman, 'We're better', or 'We're faster', ha ha! It wasn't necessarily arrogant, but it was inspiring if we watched a band that couldn't deliver the ferocity we were because it made us feel amazing, like, 'Oops, failure!' It was a youthful approach – you want to be better than the guy before you, you want to blow everyone away, and that was our mantra."

You left Slayer again in '92 after becoming a dad. What impact did that have on you?
"When I make a decision, I believe in it and I follow it, no matter what bumps come up in the road. I found it so gratifying because I had the time to focus on being a parent."

How did it feel rejoining Slayer in 2001?
"It felt like the right time. My schedule had opened up and it was a real learning experience. The band had gained a lot more credibility and popularity again by that point, which just made me think of the tiny clubs we'd play when I first joined. I rejoined and it was like the profile just went up again; we were playing bigger festivals, bigger venues."

Who were you closest to in Slayer?
"Jeff and I would spend a lot of time hanging out on the bus before shows. He was the guy I felt closest to."

Dave Lombardo and Scott Ian hooked up with Mike Patton and co for the return of the barmy Mr. Bungle

Are you in touch with any of the Slayer guys now?
"No, they never reached out."

Where did you first meet Mike Patton and what did you bond over?
"We bonded over avant-garde music, the kinds of things nobody else would listen to! We must have met in the late 90s; Faith No More were playing one of their last shows in Los Angeles. He came over and was like, 'Hey, you've got a new band!' which at the time was Grip Inc. We just chatted and went on from there. I have two text threads – one for Mr. Bungle and one for Dead Cross – as well as our own personal exchanges, and we're just constantly sharing videos and links, funny videos, all that kind of stuff."

Where did the idea for *Rites Of Percussion* come from – a Dave Lombardo solo album made up entirely of drum solos?
"Well, it came from these two drummers that I idolised. One was John Bonham, and the other was Tito Puente, a Latin jazz percussionist from Puerto Rico. Both of those drummers created these songs that only included drums – Tito Puente had *Hot Timbales*, which is a song Mike Patton actually turned me onto, and John Bonham had this song called *Bonzo's Montreux* that was released after his death. I *love* those two songs and Patton has been encouraging me for *years* to do this. When I presented it to him he was just like, 'Yes, finally!' He always says it's your birthright to be free and create music not only that you're known for, but the stuff that nobody would ever expect from you. It's good for a musician's soul to experiment and do something completely different."

"I ADMONISH PEOPLE WHO TALK SHIT ABOUT LARS ULRICH"

How does it feel knowing you helped get metal to places like Cuba and South America?
"I feel moved, to say the least. It makes you feel like a bridge; when I spoke to Cuban metal fans, they told me they had heard right back at the start of Slayer's career that I was Cuban and they couldn't believe it. Weirdly, the grandson of Che Guevara wrote a book, and mentioned he was a metal fan and that he loved Western music, mentioning Slayer in particular. I was like, 'I'd better not show my dad, this'll piss him off!'"

Has being estranged from the rest of Slayer affected your legacy with the band?
"I am so happy with everything I've done. Slayer is like an old relationship that's been going on for a long time. At first you get on fine, then there's quarrels. It's a family-type thing, like we're brothers, but when a fight breaks out you become distant. That's an animal in itself; I've known those guys since I was 16, 17 years old, so anything with that band runs deep in the blood. Legacy-wise, I'm a drummer who's been able to collaborate with a lot of different musicians and elevate their music, in one way or another, creating a good time, a good environment to be around. The idea of legacy and legends scares me – I just make music, man, so you guys figure that out!"

Who do you think was the best drummer of all your contemporaries?
"Tom Hunting from Exodus was the first I saw. When we left LA and went to San Francisco I saw them and was like, 'This guy is *badass*' and you know what? He still is! We played a show with those guys in Testament, and that guy is stronger than ever. He's made an amazing comeback after his illness [Tom was treated for stomach cancer in 2021] and I'm so proud of him, and I'm so happy to have seen those guys as many times as I have."

Do you think Lars Ulrich gets unfairly dismissed as a drummer?
"Absolutely! I saw [Gojira drummer] Mario Duplantier recently talking about Lars, saying some kind words. I feel Lars is an essential part of that band – anybody else and it just won't sound the same. I admonish the people who talk shit about him, I don't like that. You have to embrace who Lars is, and his contribution to Metallica's sound. They're such an inspirational band, and everybody wants to be as big as they are, and you can only do that by taking risks. They shocked people when they cut their hair or whatever, but it was part of their evolution and they clearly knew what they were doing. I love that they're still out there, kicking ass."

Which of the Big 4 were the best?
"Slayer. Ha ha ha! Who else could I pick?! We were *brutal* man, we were on top of our game, and if you watch the videos we were on fire. We really showed everyone else how it should be done – we tore everyone a new one."

***RITES OF PERCUSSION* IS OUT NOW VIA IPECAC. EMPIRE STATE BASTARD WILL TOUR THE UK IN NOVEMBER**

PRESS/BUZZ OSBOURNE

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SCREAM IF YOU WANNA GO FASTER

As well as being Svalbard's magnetic frontwoman, Serena Cherry is a die-hard rollercoaster aficionado. And *Hammer* is about to spend the day riding the rails with her at Thorpe Park

WORDS: EMILY SWINGLE • PICTURES: DEREK BREMNER

"When you hear the click, it's about to drop," advises Serena Cherry. Svalbard's vocalist and guitarist is as cool as a cucumber when she says this, which is impressive given we're currently ascending more than 100 feet into the air while strapped into a vertical tower ride named Detonator at Thorpe Park, 25 miles west of London.

As we reach the top of the ascent and the entirety of this theme park and a large chunk of the surrounding Surrey countryside spreads out beneath us, *Hammer* is struck by the view. But we're also aware that our legs are dangling down into thin air, our stomach feels hollow and our heart is thumping. The ride clanks to a stop. Was this a good idea? Are our shoes going to fall off? What if –

CLICK. Oh shiiiiiiit…

This is Serena's idea of heaven. While some people de-stress from the rigours of life with yoga, sourdough-making or simply kicking up their feet and binge-watching TV until they pass out, she loves few things more than being thrown around enormous steel or wooden structures with only a safety bar between her and the air above and/or the ground below.

Svalbard have recently been out on tour supporting Cult Of Luna and Russian Circles, and playing a run of festivals from Hellfest to ArcTanGent in the build-up to *The Weight Of The Mask*, their blackgaze-glazed post-hardcore wormhole of a fourth album. But Serena is also fresh off of a tour of her own. She's home after an impulse weekend road trip to France and Belgium to visit theme parks.

We've asked Serena to spend the day with us at Thorpe Park, partly because it seems like fun but also to explore a passion that, to an outsider, might seem pretty unusual if not downright terrifying. But as we work our way around the park, it's evident that there are deeper and more personal reasons to her love of rollercoasters beyond just the thrill of it all.

Stepping into the bubble of Thorpe Park, it quickly becomes clear that Serena feels at home here. She enthuses about her favourite rides and offers a dismissive eyeroll when walking past her least favourite. There's no need for a map of the park – she's been here so many times she could lead us around blindfolded.

"Sometimes I'll just swing by after work," she explains as we join the queue for the Stealth rollercoaster. It's the fastest coaster in the UK, and it's also Serena's favourite on her home turf. "I'll shut my laptop, drive down and do a circuit of Detonator and Stealth on a loop," she says.

On record and onstage, Serena is a magnetic presence. Yet away from Svalbard's raging noise and shifting musical dynamics, an air of calm introspection surrounds her. She admits she's happiest when left to her own devices and talks enthusiastically about her multiple interests, including gaming and the intricacies of Formula 1 racing. But it's her dedication to riding the world's greatest rollercoasters that truly shines through.

The fascination started when she was seven or eight, on a visit to Alton Towers. It was the fearsome Nemesis ride, with its alien structure, clouds of smoke and "rivers of blood", which triggered something in her mind.

"It was like I'd stepped into another world," she says.

Though she'd have to wait a few years until she was tall enough to ride Nemesis, the sheer spectacle was enough to spark a lifelong enthusiasm. Today she's ridden more than

Serena joins the carnival area's mime troupe

Thorpe Park supports the nonprofit Pride in Surrey

Not very exciting, this ride...

We're gonna need *a lot* more two pence pieces...

Stealth! Serena will never tyre of this ride

750 different coasters around the world and, as she points out, when you get into those kinds of numbers you become somewhat of a connoisseur.

"If you've listened to thousands of bands, you become more discerning," she explains. "It's the same with rollercoasters."

While Serena has ridden all the rollercoasters at Thorpe Park multiple times, she's drawn to Detonator and Stealth in particular. The pair serve up the strongest bursts of g-force in the park – that's the pressure that whips your head back against the headrest, the acceleration that leaves you dizzy. It's one of Serena's favourite physical sensations.

"I'M ADDICTED TO THE ADRENALINE"

"You can't argue with g-force," she notes with a laugh as we click ourselves into the seats on Stealth. A couple of nerve-racking minutes later and we're done. While *Hammer* is still reeling from being thrown around and woozily trying to remember our own name, Serena is already ready to head off to the next coaster.

"I'm addicted to the adrenaline," she says as we walk. "I don't drink. I don't smoke. I don't take drugs. It's the adrenaline for me."

That adrenaline hunt has taken Serena all around the world, from Poland to America to Japan. She's tried to tie visits to theme parks in with Svalbard's touring schedule, though it's not always practical. She has occasionally persuaded her bandmates to accompany her, though they don't share quite the same level of enthusiasm.

"Once we got to a park and Mark [Lilley, drums] rode one 'coaster then went straight back to the van," she laughs.

Her favourite rollercoaster is, as she puts it, "one that essentially tries to kill you". The 'coaster in question is Intimidator 305 at Kings Dominion, Virginia, a 305-feet tall structure that dishes out some of the highest g-force that humans can experience.

"You lose your vision when you're on it, you come off and you can't feel your legs," she says. "It's a very intense ride. But that's why I like it."

More than once, people have told Serena that "rollercoasters are just for kids". It seems to be something she's taken to heart. Unlike her outspoken and assured public persona, which sees her righteously addressing important subjects such as sexual assault, revenge porn and the rise of right wing politics, today she muffles herself constantly.

"Let me know if I'm being too technical," she says more than once. Sometimes you can sense the excitement rising in her voice as she gets lost in talking about her love of rollercoasters, only for her to catch herself and dial it back.

"I tend to cover up how much I like rollercoasters all the time," she says. "People aren't afraid to say just how much they don't get it."

Like any group of people with a shared interest, rollercoaster enthusiasts gravitate towards each other. There are several groups and online forums, including the Roller Coaster Club Of Great Britain, ThorpeParkMania, TowersTimes and CoasterForce. From her childhood to her early 20s, Serena says she struggled to connect with people, but being part of this bigger community has helped her emerge from her shell, making lifelong connections in the process, including her current housemate and best friend.

"Before I joined CoasterForce in 2010, I was super-shy," she says. "I just didn't really know how to make friends. But then I met people who could talk about rollercoasters in the same way I could. It was a safe space."

Serena says she's at her most confident onstage and on a coaster.

"I could never go to a pub and strike up a conversation with someone, but something about going up and

performing onstage allows me to be confident, because there's a barrier of protection there."

By contrast, being strapped into a rollercoaster involves an element of true surrender.

"When you perform live, all the responsibility lies on you, but on a ride I find the loss of control very liberating," she says.

Despite her wariness at how her love of rollercoasters will be perceived, and her protectiveness towards the wider community, there are many moments when the mask slips and the passion is obvious. Sitting beside her as a ride slows to a stop, hearing her laugh, pigtails askew, reciting along with the recorded voiceovers she's heard countless times before… it's a world away from the figure who roars out lacerating metal anthems like *Open Wound* or *Click Bait* with Svalbard.

The difference between the Serena Cherry the public sees and the Serena Cherry they don't is addressed on *The Weight Of The Mask* via tracks such as *Faking It* and *To Wilt Beneath The Weight*.

"Sometimes the gap between who I'm presenting and who I am inside feels like it's getting wider and wider," says Serena. "Sometimes I feel like I'm disconnecting from myself. It becomes quite existential."

From *Defiance*'s promise to fight against depression to *How To Swim Down*'s heart-wrenching exploration of unrequited love, *The Weight Of The Mask* is more inwardly focused than any previous Svalbard album.

"The album explores depression, and how you feel like you have to put on a brave face while all this is going on," she says. "We've got so much better when talking about mental illness, but there's still that immense pressure to perform."

"THE LOSS OF CONTROL ON A RIDE IS VERY LIBERATING"

Her lyrics on *The Weight Of The Mask* are direct and revealing, consciously avoiding ambiguity.

"It's like reading my diary," she says. "People always ask what Svalbard want to achieve, what the goal is. For me, it's to connect with people. I want our lyrics to be immediately understood, and to make people feel less alone. Writing is like having a dark thought, pulling it out, and transforming it into a seed. When the fans listen, they plant it, and I watch it grow into something else. And it's a very transformative, healing process."

We're back on our tour of Thorpe Park's rollercoasters. Next up is a twisted steel construct called The Swarm.

"I interviewed You Me At Six up there once," Serena says, pointing at the first peak, and referencing the Surrey quintet who wrote the soundtrack to the ride. While Serena doesn't get scared about going on 'coasters, she admits that climbing one and standing, exposed to the elements, at the top was another matter entirely. "It was a whole new experience. It's the difference between being in a plane and being strapped to the top of it," she laughs.

There is a direct connection between *The Weight Of The Mask* and Thorpe Park, she reveals. The song *Pillar In The Sand* is a homage to the park's Halloween-centred Fright Nights, in which it stays open after dark, filled with scary mazes and actors in horror get-ups.

"The song is about something that outlasts everything else – when something has the same magical feeling every

After joining CoasterForce, Serena made friends with likeminded enthusiasts

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Aaaaaand there goes lunch...

"THE VENN DIAGRAM FOR ROLLERCOASTERS AND METAL OVERLAPS"

time you come back to it," she says. "That's Fright Nights at Thorpe Park for me. It's a pillar in the sand where everything else feels transient in my life. It feels like coming home."

In 2019, Serena got the opportunity to compose the music for the Fright Night maze Creek Freak Massacre. It's something she says is her proudest achievement.

"Svalbard is always me and my own emotions pouring out, and I'd never had to represent someone else's story musically before," she says. "There's something interesting about having your music play in a public space where people haven't come there specifically to listen to it, but they're still affected by it emotionally. It's an amazing thing to watch. It feels like your art is a part of something bigger. It was really creatively fulfilling."

She knows that not everyone will understand her passion for rollercoasters, but points out that metal fans, especially, may relate better than many.

"The Venn diagram for rollercoasters and metal definitely overlaps," she says. "They're both extreme, and they can be intimidating to an outsider."

But for her, there's also a much more personal element to it.

"When I'm riding a rollercoaster, it's the one time in my life where I'm not depressed or anxious," she says. "Of course, I've had times at theme parks where the depression has hit me super-hard and I've hid in the toilets crying – that's just the reality of depression. But when I'm on my favourite rollercoaster, it's an almost guaranteed emotional pick-me-up."

Having spent the best part of a day riding the rollercoasters at Thorpe Park, the joy that being around and on these crazy, hair-raising, death-defying rides gives her is evident.

"There's nothing else in this world like rollercoasters," she smiles. "It's such an all-encompassing experience."

SVALBARD'S NEW ALBUM, *THE WEIGHT OF THE MASK*, IS OUT NOW ON NUCLEAR BLAST. THANKS TO THORPE PARK – FOR MORE INFO, VISIT WWW.THORPEPARK.COM

Serena and *Hammer*'s own Emily on Detonator, a 100-foot drop tower

"IT'S A BLACK METAL ROLLERCOASTER!"

The world's five greatest rides according to Serena Cherry

INTIMIDATOR 305
Kings Dominion, US
"It's the most intense roller-coaster experience in the world in terms of g-force, it's blisteringly fast and 305 feet tall. The kind of 'coaster that makes you lose vision and all leg functionality."

WODAN
Europa-Park, Germany
"Wodan is a wooden 'coaster that is a little bit rough around the edges, but you will laugh the whole time. It has a whole Norse mythology theme, which makes it a pretty black metal rollercoaster."

STEALTH
Thorpe Park, UK
"Zero to 80mph in just 1.8 seconds – the launch is exhilarating. It's one of those 'coasters that puts a big smile on your face. There's nothing boring about Stealth – it's short, it's sweet."

ZADRA
Energylandia, Poland
"This one is a hybrid 'coaster [made of wood with a steel track] that has a perfect flow state of elements. It has a faultless mixture of air time and inversions [an element that turns riders upside down]. There's no dead spots on it at all."

HAKUGEI
Nagashima Spa Land, Japan
"It has very intense air time – you're thrown out of your seat a lot. But it's super-graceful and really smooth. It also has an amazing view, because it's by the coast. It has three zero-gravity inversions, too."

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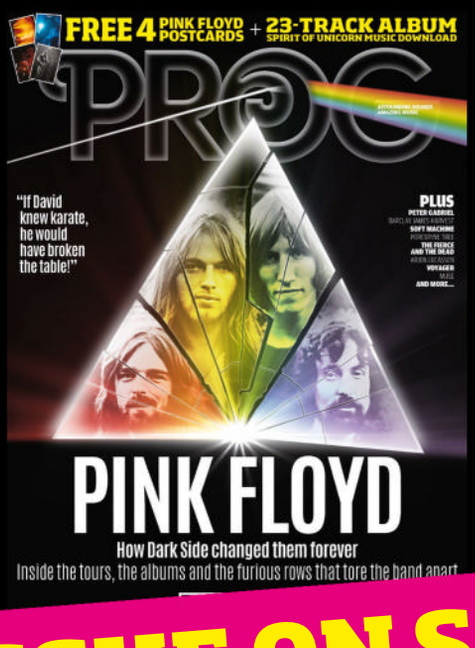

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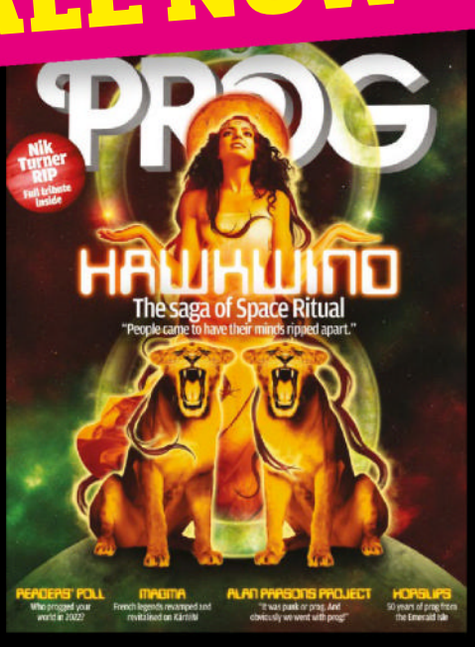

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EDITED BY: JONATHAN SELZER • PICTURE: STEPHANIE CABRAL

Within Temptation suspect we're not living through mankind's golden age

WITHIN TEMPTATION

Bleed Out

FORCE MUSIC RECORDINGS

Symphonic metal titans grapple with the weight of our world

THERE ARE FEW bands in modern metal who have shown such a consistent evolution from record to record as Within Temptation. On 2007's *The Heart Of Everything* album, they started to experiment with more guitar-driven songs as an antidote to 2004's hyper-polished *The Silent Force*. 2011's *The Unforgiving* contained many of the best riffs they'd written yet. Three years later, *Hydra* saw them look outside of their genre to EBM and dance music to find new ways to structure songs – a practice they carried on when writing *Resist*'s lush, synth-laden single, *Supernova*.

As massive in scale and as cinematic as any Within Temptation record, eighth album *Bleed Out* sees the Dutch sextet continue to traverse the land of darkness, melancholy and power they entered on *Resist*, but to an even greater extent; it's undoubtedly the band's heaviest record to date, both lyrically and musically. And without the plethora of guest artists that have graced their last two records, this time they're showing us what they can do on their own.

UNDOUBTEDLY THE BAND'S HEAVIEST RECORD TO DATE

Though Within Temptation may baulk at calling *Bleed Out* a political record, it's the first time they've been so overt in expressing their stance on global issues without shrouding them in literary metaphor or fantastical imagery.

Arguably, they've always been political. Since 2000's *Mother Earth*, they've been begging us to look around at the catastrophic consequences of our destructive hubris (*'Haven't you seen the ruins of our world?'*), and anyone who's been to one of their shows knows that frontwoman Sharon den Adel doesn't shy away from voicing her support for the marginalised.

Opening track *We Go To War* is an explosion of crystal-clear synths, foreboding choirs

PRESS/TIM TRONCKOE

and some seriously heavy tech-metal riffing. Sharon's voice has always been the heart of the band's sound, maturing over the years from effervescent soprano to something weightier, more refined and more powerful, with real grit. On *Bleed Out*, she uses all of her range and dynamics, painting the songs with light and shade for maximum impact. The influence of Kate Bush is still apparent on *Wireless*, a stunning and furious indictment of the war in Ukraine.

Having adapted their process of making music to fit the strange new world of the 2020s, the band have dotted single releases throughout the last two years as and when they've seen fit. That means half the tracks on *Bleed Out* aren't new, but it's still interesting to see where they fit into the whole puzzle. The title track stands out as perhaps the best example of who Within Temptation are today: fiercely opinionated and passionate, with an impeccable ear for gorgeous melody, rousing choruses and some crushingly heavy metal befitting of their message – a rallying cry for freedom and autonomy. *Worth Dying For* sees them briefly recall their symphonic metal days, with an added urgency.

The album's only real light moment, *Ritual*, is the only one that doesn't quite fit, showing they're at their best when they have a real fire lit under them. Sometimes, Within Temptation's music has sounded like the end of the world; *Bleed Out* sees them open a window onto a new one.

FOR FANS OF: **Evanescence, Lacuna Coil, Iron Maiden**

CATHERINE MORRIS

AMORPHIS
Queen Of Time (Live At Tavastia 2021)
ATOMIC FIRE

Melodeath favourites give a modern classic the live treatment

Amorphis celebrated their 30th anniversary in 2020 by filming three livestreams in Helsinki's Tavastia club: one for each decade of folky melodeath trailblazing. They returned there the following year to re-record 2018's majestic *Queen Of Time* as a CD/DVD. As opener *The Bee* drops from that twiddling synth line to a sharp metal riff, the music's clearly lost none of its excellence in this new form. The visuals are also occasionally dazzling, such as the torrent of spotlights during *Daughter Of Hate*. Yet, with the tracklist being exactly the same and the performance lacking a live audience, this isn't different enough from the original to feel worthwhile for non-completists.

FOR FANS OF: **Eluveitie, Insomnium, Dark Tranquillity**

MATT MILLS

ANGELUS APATRIDA
Aftermath
CENTURY MEDIA

Spanish thrashers add progression to the art of pile-driving

Since 2000, Angelus Apatrida have campaigned to spread their ferocious manifesto of speed, power and brutality across Europe. Bagging their first homeland No.1 in 2021 with their self-titled seventh album, the four-piece are firing on all cylinders as they unleash their latest. Entering more progressive territories, songs like *Snob*, featuring Hatebreed frontman Jamey Jasta, and *Cold* expand on the band's death metal/thrash sound, packing more melodic choruses and sweeping instrumental sections than ever before, all without sacrificing their relentless integrity. Though a touch lengthy, they proudly fly the flag for traditional metal here, blasting out a solid album that has all the right stuff to get pits flying and heads banging.

FOR FANS OF: **Testament, Sepultura, Kreator**

HYWEL DAVIES

ÅRABROT
Of Darkness And Light
PELAGIC

Norway's avant-rock deviants get a whiff of stadium status

It's always been about the path less travelled for Årabrot, and with their 10th album that's never been truer. As per usual, husband-and-wife duo Kjetil Nernes and Karin Park bestow glowering, apocalyptic blues and Swans-imbued pulsations upon us. This time around, they've also cooked up a side serving of dancefloor-filling alt rock that seems to strive for stadium status. While the band's ability to write a solid-gold hook has never been in question, it's always been presented through a filter of *weird*. Here, though, their veiny pop muscle is flexing in an overt, borderline showy manner. It's a strange and exciting twist, leading us to wonder whether next year's Eurovision might get its Norwegian gothic on.

FOR FANS OF: **Nick Cave, Kepone, Swans**

ALEX DELLER

Beartooth are looking on the brighter side these days

BEARTOOTH

The Surface

RED BULL

Caleb and co make the long voyage to self-acceptance

NEARLY A DECADE on from Beartooth's 2014 debut, *Disgusting*, and the mindset of that album couldn't be further from frontman Caleb Shomo's thoughts. A more mature venture than those early days of lyrical self-flagellation, *The Surface* is his most balanced outing to date – a burst of glowing metalcore grappling with his turbulent journey to self-love. As the opening title track howls, *'might have pushed it to the limit – but I'm not dead yet!'*

From the off, *The Surface* is thrumming with life. Soaring instrumentals glimmer with unbridled joy, while beefy breakdowns serve as a defibrillating jolt, grounding you in the moment. *What Are You Waiting For* is perhaps the finest example of this – a soaring, moshpit-bait call-to-arms that urges listeners to overcome hardships and seize the day.

However, amid the positive affirmations, *The Surface* does make a point of balancing out euphoria and realism. While tunes such as *Riptide* and *Might Love Myself* bounce about and float in a cloud of effervescence, this album refuses to indulge in false positivity. Beartooth's signature grizzly hardcore and heavy metal grit rears its head as a reality check – the SAD anthem *Sunshine!* contrasts soaring acoustics with snarling vitriol, while *What's Killing You*'s howl of *'Life's not fair!'* is spine-tinglingly raw.

The push and pull between positivity and pain is a welcome twist on metalcore's tendency to dwell on inner demons. Instead, it's forgiving of darker moments, earnestly exploring the struggles that come with mental illness. *Look The Other Way* shows this best. Entirely stripped back, Caleb is exposed, *'picking up the pieces'* of himself. He sheds his bandana-donning bravado, allowing a glimpse at the slow, painful process he's undergone/still undergoing to reach this point of self-belief. As a whole, *The Surface* is a sharp, poignant and blazingly cathartic celebration of life, warts and all.

FOR FANS OF: Ice Nine Kills, The Devil Wears Prada, I Prevail

EMILY SWINGLE

AZIMUT

Dans Les Méandres

SELF-RELEASED

Gallic post-metallers range beyond the familiar

Nestled beneath the Alps, the city of Grenoble is better known for winter sports than introspective post-metal. Residents Azimut have something to say about that, as well as about societal entropy, on their debut. All six members are formerly of other French avant-metal outfits, and *Dans Les Méandres* is the sum of their experiences, as they pour every bit of themselves into its tumultuous hour. Musically, the usual quiet/loud dynamics apply, but occasionally manifest in interesting ways. Agitated time signatures rattle you out of your post-haze on *Echo Limpide*, and *Douce Frénésie* features latter-day Ulver-esque electronics. A largely familiar trip though post-metal terrain, but fuelled by genuine ire.

FOR FANS OF: Cult Of Luna, Amenra, Bossk

TOM O'BOYLE

BERZERKER LEGION

Chaos Will Reign

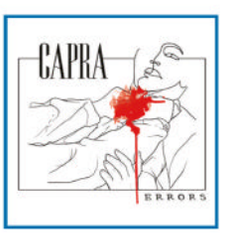
LISTENABLE

Death metal A-listers go blockbuster style on second album

Boosted by the rise of outdoor festivals and a new generation of more open-minded fans, the so-called mainstream extreme metal scene was born. From In Flames and Hypocrisy to Dimmu Borgir and Behemoth, it had no trouble combining tradition with a big, fat and bombastic sound and catchy melodies. With members from three different countries and spearheaded by Asphyx bassist Alwin Zuur and Hypocrisy live guitarist Tomas Elofsson, this second full-length offers more of the same, ticking all the right boxes down to the band having their own mascot and "Scream for me, Wacken!" choruses. Think of *Chaos Will Reign* as a Michael Bay flick: it's unapologetically big, loud, dumb and lots of fun.

FOR FANS OF: Hypocrisy, (mid-period) In Flames, Kataklysm

OLIVIER BADIN



CAPRA

Errors

METAL BLADE / BLACKLIGHT MEDIA

Louisiana hardcore furies sharpen and spread out their attack

Capra's 2021 debut album, *In Transmission*, turned a lot of heads, its furious barrage of hardcore tropes delivered with style and aplomb. Initially, *Errors* seems much the same, although it soon becomes clear that Capra have refined their songwriting chops no end. The result is that their strongest assets – frenzied riffs and heart-on-sleeve vocals – are accentuated. The album is influenced by a broader sweep of the band's record collection as well: a little Southern rock on *Loser*, some thrash on *Kingslayer*, and even a touch of blackgaze on closer *Nora (Last Call)*. With 10 songs delivered in a little over half an hour, *Errors* is a short, sharp thrill that lives up to the promise Capra showed on their debut.

FOR FANS OF: Every Time I Die, Ithaca, Sharptooth

REMFRY DEDMAN

PRESS/JIMMY FONTAINE

CARNIFEX
Necromanteum
NUCLEAR BLAST

San Diego deathcore veterans dial up the decadence

As deathcore forerunners whose influence on younger bands flexing their symphonic muscle is unquestionable, Carnifex owe their longevity to consistency if not the spectacular. Yet with their ninth album, the band's well-honed dynamics are on the brink of exploding in mighty fashion. While others employ synths for background atmosphere, the strings and choirs here are thrust to the fore, adding serious pomp and fiendish devilry to the supernatural dread of the subject matter. On his first official outing with the band, former Devildriver shredder Neal Tiemann delivers memorable leads on *Torn In Two* and the ghoulish *Crowned In Everblack*, while Scott Ian Lewis wears his various vocal masks with added ceremony. The riffs slash and breakdowns bludgeon with the best of them, but Carnifex show they can do so with a touch more class.

FOR FANS OF: Shadow Of Intent, Cradle Of Filth, Lorna Shore

ADAM BRENNAN

CIRITH UNGOL
Dark Parade
METAL BLADE

California's cult metal classicists reach an imperious pinnacle

Only the metal world could produce a tale like that of Cirith Ungol, who formed in the early 70s, blew the minds of a few diehards in the 80s, split up in the early 90s, and are only now reaping their due respect and acclaim. 2020's startling *Forever Black* proved that their reunion, as with UK comeback kings Satan, finds the masters of epic doomy HM on top creative form in their dotage. With an innate understanding of what made their early work so special, *Dark Parade* rivals past glories for sheer arcane power and passion. Tim Baker's shrieks are uncannily well-preserved, Rob Garven's drums pound with berserker intensity, riffs and melodies slither and throb with sinister intent, and Cirith Ungol's crushing metal retains its freakish elegance.

FOR FANS OF: Black Sabbath, Manowar, Mercyful Fate

CHRIS CHANTLER

CREEPER
Sanguivore
SPINEFARM

Southampton's fearless goth-punks hit a new level of bombast

From their arrival on the UK scene as a gaggle of spunky, histrionic goth-punks in 2014, it was clear Creeper had the potential for greatness. Almost a decade in, that greatness has been realised with *Sanguivore*. It's not just the most spectacular work of their career, but the most irresistibly anthemic, fabulously flamboyant rock opera you're likely to hear this year. Opening with a nine-minute epic in *Further Than Forever* that Jim Steinman would be proud of, Southampton's finest proceed to rail through their myriad influences in style, packing in everything from brooding punk (*Cry To Heaven*), to bombastic heavy metal (*Teenage Sacrifice*), to propulsive goth rock (*Black Heaven*), to searing, piano-driven power balladry (*More Than Death*), splattering it all in their own, unique shades of black. Creeper have reached peak form.

FOR FANS OF: Meat Loaf, Ghost, Danzig

MERLIN ALDERSLADE

CROSSES
Goodnight, God Bless, I Love U, Delete.
WARNER MUSIC GROUP

Deftones frontman returns to a star-filled twilight zone

Deftones vocalist Chino Moreno and Far guitarist Shaun Lopez formed side-project Crosses in 2011, dropped an excellent debut of nocturnal electro-rock, then disappeared for eight years. Those frustrations were corrected by the 2022 EP, *Permanent.Radiant*, and now their second album has arrived. *Goodnight...* feels a lot lighter than Crosses' bruised and brooding debut: there's a warmth to the throbbing buzz of opener *Pleasure*, a brightness in the hollow claps and woozy instrumentation of *Found* and the glittering chorus of *Ghost Ride*, all heavier on the synth and bolder in sound and ideas. The collaborations with Run The Jewels rapper El-P on *Big Youth* and The Cure's frontman Robert Smith's presence over mellow synthwave on *Girls Float † Boys Cry* only elevate what is hopefully now a permanent fixture in our world. A welcome return.

FOR FANS OF: Depeche Mode, The Black Queen, Ultravox

DANNII LEIVERS

Go Ahead And Die aren't content to brood on the world's ills

GO AHEAD AND DIE
Unhealthy Mechanisms
NUCLEAR BLAST

Cavalera and son take their hardcore project off the deep end

IT SAYS SOMETHING about Max Cavalera's status as an unstoppable force of productivity that Go Ahead And Die's second album is the third record he's released since the start of the summer. Granted, the first two were revamped and re-recorded versions of Sepultura's scrappy first releases, but the vicious new editions of *Morbid Visions* and *Bestial Devastation* attest to Max's refusal to half-arse anything he puts his hand to.

Much like the 80s crossover punks they so lovingly pay tribute to, Go Ahead And Die have gone heavier with their subsequent effort. Drafting in extreme metal drummer Johnny Valles, Max and son Igor ('no, not that one') Amadeus go so hard on the likes of *Desert Carnage*, *Split Scalp* and *No Easy Way Out* that they emerge in territories where being deemed death metal, thrash or hardcore comes down purely to the uniform you choose to wear. Elsewhere, *Tumors* and *Drug-O-Cop* chuck up neck-bothering ragers that could easily have come from *Beneath The Remains* – a heavier flavour of crossover that's since been used so brilliantly by the likes of Power Trip, Creeping Death and Gatecreeper.

Nice as these throwbacks are, the magic of *Unhealthy Mechanisms* lies in its most bilious and ferocious assaults. *Chasm* and *Cyber Slavery* offer a maelstrom of riffs and spiky, snotty vocals from Igor Amadeus that lend fresh zeal to the band's sound and are utterly annihilating in their vitriol. Igor has, of course, previously shown off his talents in Lody Kong and Soulfly, but his work in Go Ahead And Die confirms our suspicions: with yet another prodigious Cavalera talent on the scene, surely, by 2030, nigh-on every band in heavy metal will have been touched by some distant branch of their extended dynasty like some bastard version of Six Degrees Of Kevin Bacon. The sheer swivel-eyed mania and irrepressible brilliance of *Unhealthy Mechanisms* will have you (re)welcoming your thrash-death-punk overlords.

FOR FANS OF: Doom, early Sepultura, Gatecreeper

RICH HOBSON

PRESS

Green Lung go in search of the uncanny valley

GREEN LUNG

This Heathen Land

NUCLEAR BLAST

Alternate histories and hard-hitting riffs from London's stoner-doom folklorists

EACH GREEN LUNG LP has boasted beautiful graphic design, but their third album's packaging drops this bewitching London quintet squarely in the realm of the hauntological – that strange phenomenon taking its cues from distorted childhood memories of unsettling, British post-war cultural aesthetics. The pastiche of a 1970s Pelican paperback, and the opening documentary sample, immediately suggest *This Heathen Land* is a metallic iteration of the movement generated by the Ghost Box label – all spooky Radiophonic synths and twee psychedelia with folk-horror under-currents. The map of occult sites that comes with the vinyl is Scarfolk to a tee.

It's a milieu that fits Green Lung snugly, even if there are more 90s influences and American reference points than you might expect – although infectious opener *The Forest Church* nails their 'folklore, riffs and legends of Britain' USP perfectly. *Mountain Throne* launches on a groove that recalls Cathedral in their pre-millennial 'fun phase', while the doomy *One For Sorrow* (not a Steps cover, alas) even works in a Dimebag-damaged detuned breakdown riff. At first, this juxtaposition feels a bit jarring, but the disorientating time-scoop effect is a classic hauntological gambit, and, presumably for these musicians, Pantera and the stoner rock boom are as much an offbeat trigger of childhood nostalgia as *Yessongs* and the *Bagpuss* soundtrack were to the previous generation.

The synths are a consistent joy, while the effervescent twin guitars are discreetly heroic – the organ/axe trade-offs on rollicking highlight *Hunters In The Sky* are a special treat. Tom Templar's eccentric pipes walk a fine line between atmospheric storyteller and hard rock party-starter, his multi-tracked harmonies sometimes beguiling – as on *Song Of The Stones*, the LP's only pure ritualistic folk tune – sometimes alarming. Most importantly, the sheer quality of songwriting edges ever upwards.

FOR FANS OF: Black Sabbath, Blood Ceremony, Ghost

CHRIS CHANTLER

DORO

Conqueress - Forever Strong And Proud

NUCLEAR BLAST

All hail Germany's queen of steel-plated banger-fests

The certified Metal Queen, Doro Pesch has always been more versatile than advertised. At heart, this, her 14th solo album, is a thunderous heavy metal record, and Doro is in her element on bruising opener *Children Of The Dawn* and the scuffed-leather sprint of *Time For Justice*. But beyond the Maiden-like thump of *All For You* and a rowdy duet with Rob Halford on Priest's *Living After Midnight*, Doro is abuzz with ideas. *Bond Unending* is an immaculate radio rock earworm; *Best In Me* and *Fels in der Brandung* are tender, atmospheric ballads; *Love Breaks Chains* is a gritty, gothic rock melodrama. Raucous and celebratory, *Conqueress* sums up Doro's 40 years of service to metal with more charm than ever.

FOR FANS OF: Judas Priest, Burning Witches, Liv Sin

DOM LAWSON

DAVID EUGENE EDWARDS

Hyacinth

SARGENT HOUSE

Wovenhand's Christian mystic frontman heads to the hinterlands

Hyacinth might be David Eugene Edwards' first solo album, but he has form for exploring the more apocalyptic side of rock, drone and Americana with 16 Horsepower and Wovenhand. Given he seems the type to drop the various orders of angels into casual conversation, it's no surprise that the record is charged with religious and mythological significance. It's a fever dream formed of skeletal acoustic guitar and glowering electronics, with David's bleary yet booming voice intoning tales that are literate, beautiful and portentous. *Hyacinth* might not be as clangorous as Wovenhand, but it's no less weighty – an album of urgent murmurs prickling both nape and conscience.

FOR FANS OF: Wovenhand, Townes Van Zandt, Årabrot

ALEX DELLER

END

The Sin Of Human Frailty

CLOSED CASKET ACTIVITIES

Counterparts and Fit For An Autopsy members turn up the noise

Metalcore supergroup End have managed to impress listeners via math metal, elbow-swinging breakdowns and blackened crust storms. Their second album lassos a Gatling gun rage and calm-before-savage-storm deception, indicative in the sly shift from the sweet science pummelling of *A Predator Yourself* to *Gaping Wounds Of Earth*'s initial placidity. Keyboard swells and an industrial sledgehammer are also massaged into the frenzy as *Embodiment Of Grief*'s soundscape serenity underpins battering noise-core and *Hollow Urn* weaves in fierce power electronics. *The Sin Of Human Frailty*'s indistinguishable chunks and industrial sounds are more factory setting than uniquely crafted, but End are forging a path instead of resting on names and laurels.

FOR FANS OF: Jesus Piece, Teeth, Better Lovers

KEVIN STEWART-PANKO

PRESS/ANDY FORD

FORTÍÐ
Narkissos
PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS

Iceland's shape-changing black metallers reveal their hand

Fortíð have always been a hard band to keep track of. They were once a solo project. They relocated from Iceland to Norway, but now they're in Iceland again. And they were a folky Viking metal band, but now they're a more riff-fuelled black metal force – albeit with the folk bits still present in a few songs. However, the good news is that *Narkissos* wields that mystery to its advantage. The opening title track is a sprint of riffs and solos, before *Drottnari* pivots in a new direction, gradually introducing acoustic guitars and greater melody. By *Uppskera* and *Þúsund Þjáninga Smiður*, the album's unfolded to reveal the full extent of Fortíð's ambient and folk-worshipping inclinations. Despite that hour-long runtime making things a tad long in the tooth, this is an evolutionary experience and well worth a listen.

FOR FANS OF: Wiegedood, Watain, Enslaved

MATT MILLS

THE HIRSCH EFFEKT
Urian
LONG BRANCH

Beautiful and bonkers noise from Germany's eclectic enthusiasts

The only thing to expect from this German trio is the unexpected. After each member contributed separate songs to last year's *Solitaer* EP, The Hirsch Effekt's sixth full-length maintains the same feel of disparity and surprise. Bookended by the beautiful, serene *Agora* and *Eristys*, the middle six tracks see the band traverse all manner of terrain and temperaments. The lush build of *Otus*'s post-rock serenade and the dreamy *Stegodon* wouldn't be out of place in Alcest's or Leprous's embrace, while the fiddly bluster of *2054* and *Blud*'s chaotic throttling have an inescapable Dillinger feel. After launching with jagged riffs and urgent drumming, the title track's journey through angelic and distorted vocals, glitchy FX and haunting dystopian soundscapes is the most confident example of the band's daring MO – for listeners with the capacity to process it.

FOR FANS OF: The Dillinger Escape Plan, Devin Townsend, Leprous

ADAM BRENNAN

KADABRA
Umbra
HEAVY PSYCH SOUNDS

US psych rockers seek to free your ass, so your mind will follow

Formed in 2020, Kadabra weren't afforded the luxury of road-testing material when it came to their 2021 debut, *Ultra*. While follow-up *Umbra* still luxuriates in fuzzy psych riffs, the heavy metal thrust of *High Priestess* and *Battle Of Avalon* suggests the band have recognised a higher calling than cosmic noodling: getting audiences to headbang and shake their asses. Undoubtedly, the best moments here lie in the more animated instrumentals, the push-and-pull of riffs in *Midnight Hour* and *Mountain Tamer* evoking Scandinavian stoner's propensity for Mountain and Deep Purple-style grooves. That said, there's still a little too much doom in Kadabra's DNA for fans to throw shapes en masse just yet, and the repetitive nature of *The Serpent* and *The Devil* sees them veer dangerously close to genre clichés.

FOR FANS OF: Nebula, Green Lung, King Goat

RICH HOBSON

KRIEG
Ruiner
PROFOUND LORE

Outspoken US black metallers beat a path to the primitive

Long-standing USBM institution Krieg are fronted by metal journalist/shit-stirrer Neill Jameson. The band's voluminous discography is rife with splits and one-off singles, but this is their first proper full-length since 2014. It's the sound of endless nightmares, of haunted houses and self-mutilations, of serrated steak knives rending tender flesh into hunks of bloody meat. It is black metal in the same way Von is, which is to say it sounds like the work of dangerous men with impulse control disorders. *Manifested Ritual Horror*, *No Gardens Grow Here* and *Solitarily, A Future Renounced* all mix teeth-rattling waves of hot black noise with occasional death-rock flourishes and moments of pummelling black thrash. An all-engulfing descent into modern primitivism, *Ruiner* is a sick, disgusting experience, and a wholly satisfying one too.

FOR FANS OF: Leviathan, Nachtmystium, Judas Iscariot

KEN McINTYRE

SMALL MERCIES

Where EP is short for 'Epic Potential'

AWAKENING SUN
I Am More
SEEK & STRIKE

A concept EP about possessing people's minds, this is a haunting, frenetic adventure through modern metal laden with hard-hitting choruses and fun riffs. It's catchy and enjoyable, if far from revolutionary.

CHERI FAULKNER

OVERTHROW
Ascension Of The Entombed
SELF-RELEASED

Another reason to conclude that death metal is the best, *Ascension Of The Entombed* offers four commanding chunks of unholy aggro, with foul echoes of Incantation and Belphegor. It all sounds huge enough to raise the dead.

DOM LAWSON

THE CALLOUS DAOBOYS
God Smiles Upon The Callous Daoboys
MNRK

Daoboys' hyperactive mathcore has been as hit-and-miss as their multi-genre mash-up would suggest, but this three-tracker is one of their stronger releases.

REMFRY DEDMAN

SLEEP THEORY
Paper Hearts
EPITAPH

Sleep Theory have nailed the art of dynamic, radio-friendly metalcore here. Smoothly working raw-edged breakdowns, ragged growls and funk basslines into flittering pop soundscapes, it's an impressive debut.

EMILY SWINGLE

COPSE
Old Belief I New Despair
CHURCH ROAD

The blackgaze craze is a few years behind us, but the frenzied interaction of despair and elation of *Old Belief* and the dreamlike contemplation of *New Despair* proves an earnest two-track from the promising Bristolians.

TOM O'BOYLE

SWARTZHEIM
Sympathy
LOMMEBAJER

Led by a triple-axe attack, the new EP from these Xentrix-fancying Danes is a love letter to thrash metal's first wave. These four tracks are loaded with lightning-fast riffs and hooks as sharp as a machete.

EDWIN McFEE

In This Moment are definitely in the ascendant

IN THIS MOMENT
Godmode
BMG

LA's spectacular metal chameleons go for top-tier status

AFTER 18 YEARS of solid grind, In This Moment have reached a pivotal stage. Led by singer and visionary and witchy high priestess, Maria Brink, the LA quintet's career can be best described as a slow burn. They've evolved their sound from melodic metalcore with their debut, *Beautiful Tragedy*, to a vivid metal stomp, before stepping things up on 2017's bluesy, occult-themed *Ritual*. Since then, they've continued to expand their sonic palette and climb into bigger venues – their last album, 2020's *Mother*, deftly balanced the light and the dark and saw their already mesmerising live shows evolve into full-blown, eye-popping performance art.

With *Godmode*, ITM are ready to take the next step. Hardened by a glint of industrial metal and Nine Inch Nails-inspired electronics on *Sacrifice*, the throbbing title track and an electro-goth cover of Björk's *Army Of Me*, these songs are among the band's heaviest to date: crisp, razor-sharp, and buoyed by memorable, slick choruses. Maria has become one of metal's most unique, distinctive vocalists, and she's introduced a new dimension to her voice with every album. Matters are elevated from the get-go on lead single *The Purge*, where, following an addictive verse and chorus that see her show off her ability to switch between gravel-toned and saccharine sweet, she lets rip a scream that lasts for a lung-shredding 26 seconds. Later, on *Skyburner*, she's sighing wistfully and floating in the stars on a Deftones-ian chorus, while she works herself into a rage on *Damaged*, with guest vocalist Ice Nine Kills' Spencer Charnas slotting in perfectly among eerie keys and sinister guitar lines.

Anyone who's been paying attention knows that, for some time, In This Moment have had the live show and back catalogue to grant them access to metal's top tier. If there's any justice in the world, *Godmode* will be the album that finally sees them break down the door.

FOR FANS OF: Nine Inch Nails, Rob Zombie, New Years Day

DANNII LEIVERS

LASTER
Andermans Mijne
PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS

Dutch black metal renegades have a ball in the deep end

Laster's 11-year career has become more interesting as they've sloughed off their overt black metal influences. This fourth album is baffling but often brilliant, mixing the last of their post-BM residue with everything from alt rock and post-hardcore to shoegaze and lounge jazz. But such is their skill that it all sounds coherent. Riffs are as likely to jab and stab as they are to tickle or pirouette, while N.'s quasi-choral vocals seep stickily through like an unexplained stain on the ceiling. It's all thoroughly and thrillingly abnormal.

FOR FANS OF: Ashenspire, Blind Idiot God, Faith No More

ALEX DELLER

LORD OF SHADOWS
Echoes Of Yore
MEUSE MUSIC / TRAGEDY PRODUCTIONS

Dramatic goth collective's aspirations falter on debut album

For lyricist Shadows, taking inspiration from your forebears has meant employing My Dying Bride's Aaron Stainthorpe and multi-instrumentalist Mike Lamb to bring his dark, romantic concept to life. Across seven tracks of glittering melodrama, Lord Of Shadows address the ghosts of love and loss via monolithic instrumentation and olde-tyme lyrics. Mike's music swells and ensnares, and the added vocals of Heike Langhans (Remina, ex-Draconian) can be deeply affecting, not least on *If The Tears Are Forgotten*. Elsewhere, Aaron pairs guttural roars with intimate narration, although *Faith Of Thy Beloved* feels like the product of a text-to-speech tool. Overall unpolished, this collective's grand intentions still need work.

FOP FANS OF: My Dying Bride, Draconian, Charlemagne

JACK TERRY

MAGGOT HEART
Hunger
RAPID EYE / SVART

Ravenous post-punk adventures from the heart of Berlin

Maggot Heart's third LP is a masterclass in raw, animalistic post-punk with a frantically beating heart. With an even tighter, more cohesive sound – the crisp, jagged edges of frontwoman Linnéa Olsson's riffing on *Parasite*, and Uno Bruniusson's staggeringly machine-like drumming on *Looking Back At You* – *Hunger* is the sound of a band giving their all like they've got nothing to lose. An emboldened Linnéa has an new air of confidence to her snarling vocal delivery: unfathomably cool yet unselfconscious, and you can practically hear her gritted teeth over the rumble of Olivia Airey's bass on wittily titled opening track *Scandinavian Hunger*. Meanwhile, gorgeous slow-burner *Archer* is the album's most tender moment, the addition of brass a surprising stroke of genius. *Hunger* is utterly addictive.

FOR FANS OF: Killing Joke, Grave Pleasures, GGGOLDDD

CATHERINE MORRIS

PRESS

MARTHE
Further In Evil
SOUTHERN LORD

Malicious doom rituals with devilish and deviant depths

Last year's murderous, nine-minute single *Victimized* was a warning. Slithering out from Bologna's darkest shadows, Marthe's eviscerating, blackened doom sounds not of this Earth yet hellbent on pummelling it to dust. A one-woman cyclone of riffs and bad vibes, Marzia Silvani conjures a deliciously unfamiliar atmosphere, as weather-beaten underground metal tropes are twisted to her own deviant ends. The result is predatory epics like *I Ride Alone*, wherein mangled, post-Bathory riffs and Marzia's blasphemous bark collide with the darkly serene shimmer of wilfully corrupted shoegaze, and nobody escapes with their san(ct)ity intact. This is a profoundly heavy work, yet laced with moments of elegant restraint. The closing *Sin In My Heart* dials down the cacophony to a noirish wash of sound, with Marzia's frantic incantations set against blank-eyed, percussive piano. A dark star is born.

FOR FANS OF: Faustcoven, Darkthrone, Myrkur

DOM LAWSON

MONDO GENERATOR
We Stand Against You
HEAVY PSYCH SOUNDS

Nick Oliveri's post-Kyuss shit-kickers go to Hell and back

Named after a song by his former band, Kyuss, the on again/off again Mondo Generator has often been used as a vehicle to help combustible bassist Nick Oliveri blow off some steam while exorcising his demons. After going through hell recently due to the deaths of some friends and family, the stoner punk icon returns to the project, which has now evolved into a more traditional band, and they've created the darkest and most personal record he's ever made. A lean and mean barrage of rage-fuelled rock, *We Stand Against You* is an unapologetically raw and sometimes unsettling listen, especially during the venomous sludge-fest *I Want Out*. *Death March* dazzles thanks to a Kyuss-flavoured lead riff, while the buzzing, bullish stomper *One Two Three Four* is one of Mondo Generator's best efforts yet.

FOR FANS OF: Winnebago Deal, Stöner, Dwarves

EDWIN McFEE

NYTT LAND
Torem
NAPALM

Siberian pagan folk pair open up a portal to primal realms

Siberian dark folk duo Nytt Land have emerged once more from the freezing fog to drag you into their mythic realm. A husband and wife duo, Anatoly and Natalya Pakhalenko began making music in 2013, and their eighth album is a transportive experience inspired by Siberian nature and Norse mythology. Sung in Old Norse and accompanied by handmade instruments such as the kantele and the talharpa, *Olenmet* begins with the crackling of burning wood, birdsong, ritual percussion and orc-ish throat singing, evoking an ancient realm bordering on the fantastical. *Nord* is a sombre, determined march, the crystalline clarion call of Natalya's vocals an azure sky above the muck and mire of Anatoly's aged croak. There's an urgency too, as primal percussive beats fuel the likes of *Rise Of Midgard*. Captivating in its mythological otherness, *Torem* awakens our primal connections to a lost wilderness.

FOR FANS OF: Wardruna, Heilung, Danheim

TOM O'BOYLE

ONI
The Silver Line
IRONSHORE

Progressive metalcore maven forms a wide-ranging alliance

Oni has rounded up the dream dinner party on *The Silver Line*. The prog-metalcore innovator has gotten experimental on his third album, fusing black metal and djent sensibilities with an eclectic flurry of genres. From Sueco's bright glimmer of pop-punk rap on *Spark* to the gloriously frazzled grit of the *The Dread*, featuring Sikth's Justin Hill, the album is impressively dynamic and brutally heavy. Polar ends of the vocal scale even feature, with high-pitched Sleeping With Sirens yelper Kellin Quinn dropping in for *Underneath My Skin*, contrasting with Howard Jones' distinctively deep, smooth-as-honey vocals on standout track *Aura*. *The Silver Line* is an ambitiously frantic patchwork that pays off, and sweltering closer *Burns My Soul* is a perfect crescendo on which to end.

FOR FANS OF: Gojira, Monuments, Lamb Of God

EMILY SWINGLE

Sophie Lloyd: have guitar, will marvel

SOPHIE LLOYD
Imposter Syndrome
AUTUMN

The UK's axeslinger extraordinaire takes her place in rock's firmament

SOCIAL MEDIA HAS no shortage of musicians displaying their often eye-popping skill and ingenuity, with the vast majority seemingly content or doomed to go no further. Yet, having a built up a massive online following that led to touring in Machine Gun Kelly's backing band, Sophie Lloyd is now unleashing what so many of her peers are unable to: a well-produced and star-backed full-length, taking her career to the next stage.

What's unsurprising is that her debut has such an unambiguous title, enlisting some high-profile names to negate the negatives of doubters and her own anxieties about breaking through the glass ceiling. Writing songs that suit the styles of the various singers employed to front them can result in either an irrepressible greatest hits album or a patchwork collection. And while *Imposter Syndrome* does conform to the latter, there's still abundant proof that Sophie has the songwriting chops to back up her impressive fretboard acuity.

Opener *Do Or Die*'s bluesy, classic metal quickly allays any fears with an immediate earworm, and the raunchy strut of *Runaway* is the best song Steel Panther's Michael Starr has sung on in years. While the extra widdle and bite of the Matthew K. Heafy-helmed *Fall Of Man* and instrumental *Lost* see Sophie embracing the shred, the album's primary focus is on well-considered arena rock anthems favouring restraint. *Avalanche* and the Southern twang of *Hanging On* both live up to their swagger, while the Lzzy Hale-fronted title track adds serious emotional clout that's tailor-made for the Halestorm singer.

Chris Robertson's turn on *Let It Hurt* is a bit too Black Stone Cherry for comfort and tired closer *Judge And Jury* might be one song too many, but neither diminish Sophie's star, which, on this evidence, rightfully deserves to keep ascending.

FOR FANS OF: Black Stone Cherry, Halestorm, Shinedown

ADAM BRENNAN

PRESS

Myrkur: Amalie Bruun has hit a purple patch

MYRKUR

Spine

RELAPSE

Denmark's folk/black metal lightning rod charts a new personal path

IN THE TEMPESTUOUS waters of contemporary music, where genre lines are regularly redrawn, Myrkur – aka Amalie Bruun – pilots a vessel entirely her own. Her latest album is a riveting odyssey, skilfully merging contrasting sonic landscapes and reflecting emotional tumult in equal measure. *Spine* is a vast, internal journey informed by the birth of Amalie's child and our increasingly disconnected world.

Myrkur's artistic vision has long juggled black metal and Danish folk via her own spiritual alchemy, but *Spine* deviates markedly from its predecessors. It's an album that revels in dichotomy yet seeks synthesis, flitting between the human connection of mother and child to the alienation accelerated by the modern era. The opening track, *Bålfærd* ('Viking Funeral'), serves as a sonic prologue of both elegy and rebirth: a metaphor for Myrkur's self-discovery and a marker that signifies a musical exodus.

Musically, *Spine* navigates a labyrinth of emotions. *Like Humans* serves a complex cocktail of airy textures and pounding undertones, with Amalie's celestial vocals as the guiding light. *Mothlike* dips into pop-noir elements with a pulsating flourish reminiscent of Abba, and *Blazing Sky* delivers blistering metal riffs that echo the restless tectonic movements of the artist's internal world. At its core, *Valkyriernes Sang* – the only track sung in Danish – connects with Myrkur's pagan roots, its exhilarating infusion of black metal effortlessly linking the mythical with the corporeal.

The title, *Spine*, suggests strength, purpose and the power of resilience. It's an album that discovers expansive new musical territories and emotional hinterlands. Here, Myrkur has orchestrated an aural kaleidoscope that balances darkness and light, the euphoric and the devastating, to produce a magnum opus in her ever-evolving catalogue.

FOR FANS OF: Alcest, Sylvaine, Kati Rán

JOE DALY

POPPY

Zig

SUMERIAN

LA's avant-pop/metal icon goes deeper into the industrial

Since kickstarting her career on YouTube in 2014, Poppy has established herself as a high-concept artist who is impossible to pin down. Having dabbled in metal, bubblegum pop and 90s alt rock, *Zig* finds her immersed in industrial metal and dark electronica; *Church Outfit* opens her fifth album with a throbbing, aggro beat you'd expect from industrial noise veterans Health. On *Hard*, her voice floats angelically over witchy synths, and closer *Prove It* is wonderfully unhinged, boomeranging between hardcore and sweet moments of contemplation. Although *Zig* covers a lot of ground, it never feels random or messy. Poppy's genre-bending feels less like an artist still searching for their sound, more an avid consumer of art, making music by her own rules.

FOR FANS OF: Ashnikko, Scene Queen, Nova Twins

DANNII LEIVERS

PRONG

State Of Emergency

STEAMHAMMER / SPV

NYC's precision-tooled groove masters keep their blades sharp

Prong's formula hasn't changed much since their formation in late-80s NYC. Thirteen albums in and lone original member Tommy Victor is still whipping out razor-sharp picking, palm-muting wizardry and hummable pinch harmonics that stomp along like boots on filthy concrete. Parallel to Manhattan's Lower East Side clean-up has been Prong's sound. There's a greater precision to *Breaking Point* and Tommy's anthemic vocals and choruses flirt with earworm status on *Non-Existence*, as *State Of Emergency* offers up 10 tracks of clenched-fist solidity, as expected. Will *Beg To Differ, Prove You Wrong* or *Snap Your Fingers, Snap Your Neck* be dropped from their live set? No, but the new tracks should fit in seamlessly.

FOR FANS OF: Helmet, Fudge Tunnel, White Zombie

KEVIN STEWART-PANKO

SAMURAI PIZZA CATS

You're Hellcome

EASTHAVEN

Electric Callboy and Fall Of Gaia members pile on the cheese

Samurai Pizza Cats is the creation of Electric Callboy's Daniel Haniß, and Fall Of Gaia's Sebastian Fischer, and their batty debut album is rounded out with fellow FOG guitarist Stefan Buchwald and ex-Eleven Years drummer Stefan Reufer. Like EC but with more aggressive screams and hookier choruses, *You're Hellcome* is so catchy it's indecent, and the videos for the singles are fittingly ridiculous. Part deathcore, part dance, SPC don't take themselves seriously and, as demonstrated by the heady number of guests, including members of Future Palace and For I Am King, the world is very much here for it.

FOR FANS OF: Fall Of Gaia, Electric Callboy, One Morning Left

NIK YOUNG

WORLD SERVICE

Heavy metal uprisings from around the globe

FLOR DE LOTO

Lines Of Nasca

SELF-RELEASED

This Peruvian folk metal crew are so relentlessly exuberant that the flute-driven insanity of their music is hard to resist. Stratovarius meets Jethro Tull in the Andes, but jauntier? Pretty much.

DOM LAWSON

GRAVEN DAGGER

Graven Dagger

HELTER SKELTER / REGAIN

No matter how cool this shadowy Argentinian entity's garage rock and psychedelic references are, this instrumental debut sounds like a diehard The Bevis Frond fan going crazy on the fuzz pedal.

OLIVIER BADIN

REBAELLIUN

Under The Sign Of Rebellion

AGONIA

More incendiary than a Molotov cocktail, Brazil's death metal campaigners rage against their country's ruling elites on an LP full of scything Krisiun-style riffage and punitive percussive blasts.

SPENCER GRADY

PRESS/GOBINDER JHITTA

STAIND
Confessions Of The Fallen
BMG

Alt rock veterans return with a 12-year sonic recharge

Staind have always divided opinion, not least due to the outspoken nature of frontman Aaron Lewis, but it's hard to deny the relatability, raw emotion and pain that his urgent cleans and deep roars tap into so uniquely. It's been 12 years since the Springfield, Massachusetts band's last studio album, but they've returned fiercely recharged and unapologetically true to themselves. Recent singles *Lowest In Me* and *Cycle Of Hurting* are unmistakable belters that bring back memories of the angst-ridden early 00s *Break The Cycle* era. These along with gentle ballad *Better Days* further Staind's legacy, while *In This Condition* is another radio-ready contender, and *The Fray* also begs to be sung along to. Staind have written the album they wanted to, and fans will thank them for it.

FOR FANS OF: **Chevelle, Puddle Of Mudd, Saint Asonia**

NIK YOUNG

SULPHUR AEON
Seven Crowns And Seven Seals
VÁN

Teutonic blackened death metallers amplify the abyssal realms

Spit in the air and the chances are that it will land on a metal band who have taken influence from H.P. Lovecraft. While some will just base a song or album on the classic works, the cosmic horror of the Cthulhu mythos is enough to make up the entire existence of Germany's Sulphur Aeon. With their fourth album, the blackened death metal crew deliver a masterclass in punishing riffs and monstrous vocals. From the searing intensity of *Hammer From The Howling Void* to the crushing weight of *Usurper Of The Earth And Sea*, *Seven Crowns And Seven Seals* sounds as colossal as the cosmic cephalopod, and the band's ability to weave in noodly prog guitar lines is as effortlessly cool as it is surprising and delighting. As mighty and frightful as Cthulhu deserves, consider *Seven Crowns...* his new entrance music.

FOR FANS OF: **The Great Old Ones, Slugdge, Necrophobic**

JACK TERRY

TIMECHILD
Blossom & Plague
MIGHTY MUSIC

Danish progressive upstarts breathe fresh life into retro rock

Having caused a bluster in prog circles with their 2021 debut album *And Yet It Moves*, Timechild's young career continues to bear fruit. But while that first album delighted many with its ode to the rich Hammond tones and heavy blues of metal's proto epoch, *Blossom & Plague* adds more lacquer and polish to their vintage sound. Following the meandering three-part *The Dying Tide*, *Call Of The Petrichor* opens up with a valiant riff that makes a mockery of the idea the band are just paying homage to yesteryear. *Buried In Autumn*'s regal twin leads and Anders Folden Brink's throaty vocals show individual members at their peak, while closer *Only Our Shadows Remain* encompasses a host of enchanted moods. And while other prog proponents widdle on for far too long, the album is done and dusted in a brisk 34 minutes, inviting an immediate repeat.

FOR FANS OF: **Deep Purple, Opeth, Sahg**

ADAM BRENNAN

TRIVAX
Eloah Burns Out
CULT NEVER DIES

Iran's extreme metal outlaw lays out a new spectrum of death

The black/death vitriol of three-piece Trivax began life in Iran as the solo project of mainman Shayan, who was exiled due to religious authoritarianism; involvement in metal in the country risks imprisonment, even death. He left Watain graffiti in Tehran before his UK escape, however, and in his own words was proud to "give them the middle finger on the way out." Second album *Eloah Burns Out* finds new, creative fertility in Shayan's emancipation. It's a contemplation of death in various manifestations, fuelled by defiantly monstrous riffing on the likes of *Against All Opposition (By Aeshma's Wrath)* and the murderously intense *Alpha Predator*. Closing track *At The End Of The World* is mellifluously sombre, sung in Shayan's native Farsi, and representative of his embattled past and future potential.

FOR FANS OF: **Archgoat, Deitus, Ninkharsag**

TOM O'BOYLE

Of Mice & Men: still exemplifying forward-thinking metalcore

OF MICE & MEN
Tether
SHARPTONE

South California metalcore survivors reap the benefits of self-reliance

OF MICE & Men have endured a lot of change since their inception in 2009, but they seem to get stronger at every turn. After parting ways with not one but two beloved vocalists in Shayley Bourget and Austin Carlile, they could have easily thrown in the towel. But since stepping up to the challenge of filling the void as lead vocalist in 2016, bassist Aaron Pauley has breathed new life into the band.

Aaron's effect on OM&M's eighth album – and the fourth with him as frontman – is particularly special, whether he's in melodic or aggressive mode. *Into The Sun* is a satisfying blast of stadium rock, *Eternal Pessimist* is deliciously vicious, and *Enraptured* has an unexpectedly strong Tool vibe to it. However, it's the gentle, gripping title track that steals the show this time around. It builds and soars beautifully, and Aaron's voice is perfectly emotive throughout.

Tether does an impressive job of revealing the band's growth while still being comfortingly authentic to their familiar, distinctive sound. The quartet self-produced and engineered all the songs on this release, Aaron mixed and mastered the album, and drummer Tino Arteaga designed and painted the album's artwork. Clearly, they put their all into this, and it comes across in their powerful fretwork, the thoughtful lyrics, and the experimental sounds woven in and out of the songs.

Indigo and closing track *Zephyros* are a touch too ethereal, but it's hard to deny that these tracks still do a stellar job of neatly wrapping up the album. They're a reminder that Of Mice & Men are as deliberate in their choice of track order and album cohesion as they are in their songwriting, and it makes for a powerfully immersive journey.

FOR FANS OF: **Beartooth, Jamie's Elsewhere, The Amity Affliction**

NIK YOUNG

PRESS

Kristin Hayter undergoes a sonic and psychic baptism

REVEREND KRISTIN MICHAEL HAYTER

Saved!

PERPETUAL FLAME MINISTRIES

Grand experiments in spiritual warfare from Lingua Ignota's new incarnation

IN HER PREVIOUS incarnation as Lingua Ignota, Kristin Hayter released several jaw-dropping records, each one an uncompromising exploration of the singer's own personal traumas. Not unreasonably, she eventually concluded that tethering her artistic identity to all that darkness and terror was probably unhealthy. Thus, one of heavy music's most idiosyncratic voices would be reborn as Reverend Kristin Michael Hayter: a new persona for a radical change of musical focus.

Although littered with sonic subterfuge, *Saved!* is, in essence, a gospel record. An exercise in seeking salvation through the ecstasy of religious fervour, it strips away most of the excoriating noise of the Lingua Ignota years, revealing the true depth and breadth of Kristin's extraordinary voice over swampy, treated pianos. *I'm Getting Out While I Can* is a gently confounding entry point. As the audio degrades in real time – a purposeful act of self-sabotage – her tangibly sincere vocal refuses to be bowed by the chaos and grows more zealous and soulful as the song progresses. Similarly raw and sonically sketchy, *All Of My Friends Are Going To Hell* is feverish, broken blues, drawn from treacly, theological swamps, while the stunning *I Will Be With You Always* is a distant cousin of Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds's *The Mercy Seat*, that song's bruised, smouldering fatalism replaced with tortured defiance in the face of doomed love. Elsewhere, the bluegrass jig *Precious Lord, Take My Hand* and Old Testament rabble-rouser *There Is Power In The Blood* are brief passages that fulfil a skewed, interstitial role, and *May This Comfort And Protect You* is an austere hymn rendered in ragged, Tom Waits-like tones.

Admittedly, the closing *How Can I Keep From Singing* poses quite the challenge. An eight-minute gospel dirge, it is haunted by the sound of Kristin "speaking in tongues" – an emblem of religious ecstasy that is extremely unsettling to witness.

FOR FANS OF: **Wovenhand, Diamanda Galás, Dorthia Cottrell**

DOM LAWSON

TROUNCE

The Seven Crowns / Live At Roadburn

HUMMUS

Coilguns members unleash a post-metal broadside

Featuring members of noise rock mavericks Coilguns, Trounce do love a blastbeat. This opulent double set is full of them. But whether hammering away in the studio on *The Seven Crowns*, or audibly spin-kicking people's brains into orbit on *Live At Roadburn*, they're more than mere speed-freaks. More firmly rooted in leftfield death metal and hardcore's weirdo wing than anything more conventional, songs like *Faith, Hope, Love* and *The Wheel* are full of skewed, melodic fragments and dissonant diversions. Blastbeats do remain a persistent and welcome feature. *The Goose And The Swan* is just one of many artfully aggressive songs that hammers its subtleties home with brute force.

FOR FANS OF: **Four Stroke Baron, Coilguns, Gridlink**

DOM LAWSON

TWIN TEMPLE

God Is Dead

PENTAGRAMMATON

California's Satanic Doo-Wop duo liberate the libido

When Twin Temple's debut emerged in 2019, they were one of the most exciting breakouts of recent years. Their self-styled 'Satanic Doo-Wop', a bewitching blend of 60s girl groups, Screamin' Jay Hawkins, Amy Winehouse and surf pop, was so fresh it almost bordered on gimmickry, although any such concerns are washed away on this follow-up. Leaning into their more soulful inclinations, *Burn Your Bible* and *Two Sinners* have a timeless, cinematic quality, aided by warm, scratchy production reminiscent of The Shangri-Las. In addition, the pair are overt in pushing their themes of sexual empowerment and blasphemy on tracks like *Let's Have A Satanic Orgy* and *Be A Slut (Do What You Want)*. Devilishly good fun.

FOR FANS OF: **The Great Horned One, The Shangri-Las, Amy Winehouse**

DANNII LEIVERS

VANISHING KIDS

Miracle Of Death

AURAL MUSIC

Mystical, emotional reveries from the Wisconsin hinterlands

Vanishing Kids' sixth album is a swirling gothic/psychedelic voyage of life, death, love and loss. Transcending simple genre definitions, it touches on elements of alternative, doom, shoegaze, heavy metal and classic rock without ever settling on any of them. But far from unfocused, this is a mystical tour de force that merges blazing guitar solos, eerie organs and Nikki Drohomyreky's haunting vocals to make a darkly sublime vision. *Midnight Child*'s swinging groove and instantly hummable riff is straight from of the Sabbath playbook, while lengthy closer *Dust* leaves you uplifted despite its melancholic undertones. An extraordinary album of mystifying power.

FOR FANS OF: **Bauhaus, Crippled Black Phoenix, Uriah Heep**

REMFRY DEDMAN

PRESS

VARG
Ewige Wacht
NAPALM

Epic blackened Viking metallers have Odin on their side

Bavarian pagan metallers Varg are as much about storytelling as they are about conjuring skull-splitting metal. Excavating Norse myths, their ability to hurl the imagination to other realms is uncanny. Opener and certified banger *Immer Treu* sets a strong foundation, from which the five-piece play to their strengths of being flexible with their sound. Through the devastating heaviness of *Hammer*, which feels like taking a punch from the thunder god himself, and *Morgenrot*'s chant-along hooks, Varg's well-paced dynamics are the key to their narrative flow. However, co-vocalist Fylgja is the star here. Her soaring, Valkyrian tones send shivers down the spine, hitting a peak with the otherworldly solo track, *Járnsíðasleið*. Gripping and theatrical, *Ewige Wacht* has earned a seat in the halls of Valhalla.

FOR FANS OF: Powerwolf, Finsterforst, Equilibrium

HYWEL DAVIES

VENERA
Venera
IPECAC RECORDINGS

Korn axeman unsettles with a dark, synth-laden score

A collaboration between electronic composer Chris Hunt and Korn guitarist James 'Munky' Shaffer, Venera's only link to the metal world is the inclusion of the famed six-stringer. And yet *Venera*'s haunting, synth-driven soundscapes offer a good reminder that the metal scene doesn't have a monopoly on being heavy, because this is a caustic, powerful and haunting listen. *Swarm* conjures feelings of dark, murderous, existential dread and the pummelling, broken-beat glitching of *Disintegration* builds to an apocalyptically weighty climax. Munky himself adapts to these new soundscapes; rather than riffing away he adds subtle, unsettling notes and chords to Chris's base that brilliantly complement and accentuate the overall feeling of unease and menace that *Venera* seeks to achieve. Very impressive.

FOR FANS OF: Perturbator, Health, Floating Points

STEPHEN HILL

WAYFARER
American Gothic
CENTURY MEDIA

Bloodthirsty black metal from the frontiers of the Wild West

The average spaghetti western has as much bloodshed, butchery, treason and stacks of coffins as any black metal album, so Wayfarer's audacious match-up of the two makes more sense than it initially seems. What's more metal than thunderous hooves and firing squads? From the vast, unforgiving plains of (ahem) Denver, Colorado, Wayfarer mine the US's brutal pioneer days for inspiration as they colour their snarling melodic BM with shades of melancholy Americana and cinematic, Ennio Morricone-inspired instrumental passages. The band's fifth album is rife with tales of ruthless land barons and steely-eyed gunmen. Plaintive death ballads like *A High Plains Eulogy* sit comfortably alongside vicious melo-black blasters like *To Enter My House Justified*. The highlight is the bleak, harrowing *The Cattle Thief*, which sounds like a blood-thirsty posse hunting and quartering the title's rustler. A dust-caked masterpiece of atmosphere and bludgeon.

FOR FANS OF: Spiritworld, Blackbraid, Agalloch

KEN McINTYRE

XORSIST
At The Somber Steps To Serenity
PROSTHETIC

Young Swedeath wolves party like it's still 1990

After Nihilist's late bass player Leif Cuzner came up with the famous 'Swedish death metal guitar sound' by turning up all the knobs of his Boss HM-2 pedal to the max and bolstered by Entombed's *Left Hand Path* album, bands have been recording at Stockholm's Sunlight studio with producer Tomas Skogsberg at the helm, hoping to recapture that same magic. And so have Xorsist. It's no wonder their biggest achievement here is their six-string tone, fatter than a dozen-sausage sandwich with extra sauce. You can feel this young trio's hunger, especially with a drummer more eager to emulate Sodom's Witchhunter than the expected d-beat. But after Lik's and Paganizer's recent lessons in classic Swedeath, they need to get a less erratic dynamic and get the right hooks at the right time if they want to make in the long run.

FOR FANS OF: Entombed, Dismember, Necrophobic

OLIVIER BADIN

Wargasm and Fred Durst prepare to go bananas

WARGASM
Venom
UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP

London's electro-metal upstarts incite a sonic riot

IN THE FIVE years since they bounced head-first into an unsuspecting metal scene, Wargasm have already racked up millions of streams, played main stage sets at the likes of Download, Louder Than Life and Bloodstock, and nabbed supporting slots with everyone from Babymetal to Limp Bizkit. Now, with a debut full-length album to finally show for their efforts, it's time to nut up or shut up – and the genre-splicing duo have delivered and then some.

Bashing together elements of punk, metal, EDM and hip hop with the vigour and recklessness of a toddler who's just downed 12 cans of Red Bull, *Venom* is a relentlessly entertaining ride, driven by sheer energy and kept on course by the two-piece force of personality that is Milkie Way and Sam Matlock.

Sam's deranged screams bouncing off Milkie's croons, wails and yelps makes for an electrifying dynamic, as the album leaps from the brooding, throbbing industrial rock of *Death Rattle* and *Modern Love* through to *Ride The Thunder*'s pulsating, bouncy EDM and juddering groove metal, to the peppy, Prodigy-powered drum'n'bass of *Do It So Good* and *Feral*'s jagged nu metal swagger. *S.A.D.* sounds like The Mad Capsule Markets produced by Trent Reznor, while Fred Durst's typically bullish cameo on *Bang Ya Head* is brilliant fun, the Bizkit legend dropping daft but earwormy bars over massive, groovy riffs and glitchy electronica.

The best thing about all of this? As great as *Venom* is, there's still potential to refine some of the ideas the duo are toying with. *'We're Wargasm! Wargasm sound like THIS!'* declares Milkie on outro track *Sombre Goodbye*, which teases an emotionally wrought send-off before exploding into a final flurry of riffs and screams. What Wargasm sound like is an absolute riot, and they've just dropped one of 2023's essential debut albums.

FOR FANS OF: Nova Twins, The Prodigy, Bring Me The Horizon

MERLIN ALDERSLADE

PRESS

LIVE REVIEWS

VOICE OF BACEPROT

STAGE ROOM, SAN DIEGO

Indonesia's indefatigable metal trio make waves on the West Coast

IT'S A BALMY summer evening as the final glimmers of twilight push through the grove of towering eucalyptus trees surrounding the back patio of the Stage Room. Tucked away inside the University of California, San Diego, it feels more like a remote wooded retreat than the site of the blistering metal showcase that we eagerly await: the 11th and final stop of Voice Of Baceprot's inaugural US tour.

VOB, Indonesia's sensational new musical export, file quietly across the patio and into the small venue. Comprised of three young Muslim women from West Java – Marsya (guitar, vocals), Widi (bass) and Sitti (drums) – the roaring power trio have drawn comparisons to the likes of Rage Against The Machine and System Of A Down for their electrifying and outspoken condemnations of war, misogyny and various forms of repression. Hailing from a rural district dominated by a devout Islamic faith, such wanton rebellion, from three young women, no less, has brought threats, vandalism and actual violence upon the band and their families. To say that they have sacrificed much to be here really is a massive understatement.

Unfortunately, increasingly dire news reports of an impending hurricane seem to have scared off some potential fans; tonight's crowd number just over a hundred, all of whom fall into a reverential silence as Marsya and Widi face Sitti's drum kit. They turn and face the crowd to a hail of rowdy cheers. After thanking the audience for braving the impending storm, they rip straight into *[Not] Public Property*. Seething with raw energy, Marsya slashes away on her Gibson SG while Widi unleashes a pulsating bassline that locks effortlessly into the drums. Each chord, each crack of the snare and each lyric is imbued with riveting authority. The band are road-tested and tight.

In their black hijab, their punishing attack and caustic lyrics epitomise the striking blend of tradition and rebellion that underpins their identity. Wasting no time, the band pile into their latest single, *The Enemy Of Earth Is You*, an exhilarating call-to-action against environmental destruction. Marsya flashes some deft fretwork, but the trio generate the most power when they lock into a muscular groove, driving the song to its wild, frenzied finish.

Marsya: seething with raw energy

THE SET

VOICE OF BACEPROT

[Not] Public Property
The Enemy Of Earth Is You
Age Oriented
PMS
Kawani
School Revolution
Chop Suey!
What's the Holy (Nobel) Today?
Sabotage
Testify
God, Allow Me (Please) To Play Music

Frustratingly, the sound throughout the early part of the gig is not mixed terribly well, with the sharp mid-range of the guitar lost in the trio's oceanic low end. However, by *School Revolution* it's all sorted and the girls flaunt some serious chops, with Marsya unleashing taut, staccato fretwork along with a flawless rap attack that sends the audience into blissful, shape-throwing abandon. *Kawani* and *PMS* meet with an equally ecstatic response, the latter track laden with a powerful combination of intense riffs and a sky-scraping chorus that sees a number of fans shouting *'I never needed all of your stupid fascist words'* along with the band.

Sitti on drums is an absolute powerhouse, unleashing complex polyrhythms and bouncy tempos with convincing proficiency. And enough can't be said about Widi's bass chops; combining ripping metal basslines with hip-swivelling waves of slap bass, she's the very backbone of the band's sound.

VOB have just released their full-length debut, *Retas*, and the setlist contains all eight original tracks from that album, also including *Age Oriented* and a fiery version of *What's The Holy (Nobel) Today?* They buttress their relatively slim selection of originals with a trio of covers by System Of A Down (*Chop Suey!*), Rage Against The Machine (*Testify*) and Beastie Boys (*Sabotage*). Though the setlist has them down for closing with a cover of Metallica's *Enter Sandman*, they instead finish with a drum solo, followed by a blazing thrash instrumental that leads into *God, Allow Me (Please) To Play Music* – a tense and emotionally charged anthem that speaks to the suppression and societal expectations they overcame to let their voices be heard. It is a potent and fitting way to end a 75-minute set that seems utterly barren of restraint.

After the show, the girls cool off in a classroom that's been turned into a makeshift dressing room. They are beaming. Their first tour of America has been a success. Though the crowds have been a bit smaller than what they now see in Europe, they are unconcerned. This is their first US tour after all, and in New York, they played the Gramercy Theatre – their very first theatre ("It was so fancy!" gushes Widi). In a couple of days, they'll head home to Indonesia, but not before making a very special stop. Marsya proclaims, "We're going to LA tomorrow to visit Harry Potter at Universal Studios!" All three erupt in giddy laughter.

In an age where so much music is overproduced and sanitised for mass consumption, Voice Of Baceprot are a riveting reminder of its true essence. They braved much to be here tonight, and their performance has left an indelible mark on the small but raucous crowd. The world awaits their encore.

JOE DALY

Marsya and Widi: definitely destined for Gryffindor

Voice Of Baceprot: valiant and victorious

STEPHANIE CABRAL

Deafheaven: still putting a spring in black metal's step

DEAFHEAVEN

SLOW CRUSH

ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL, LONDON

Blackgaze standard-bearers cast their spell over north London

FEW BANDS HAVE divided extreme metal fans like Deafheaven did with 2013's blackgaze masterwork, *Sunbather*. Not content to expand black metal's borders into major keys, the band pushed their sound even further, even abandoning extremity completely for 2021's shoegazing *Infinite Granite*, much to the chagrin of many of their fans. Having celebrated the former's 10th anniversary at ArcTanGent this year, the remainder of their tour has been dedicated to showcasing the breadth of their sound alongside Belgian heavy shoegazers **SLOW CRUSH**.

A hush falls over the crowd as Slow Crush take the stage, before they conjure a huge swell of sound – an atmosphere that shifts from dreamy to suffocating and back with ease. Although it's not the most energetic music, the quartet are still constantly moving, lost in a sonic world of their own making as the crowd sways and is pushed by the tides of music. Even the vocals are lost in the haze of sound, acting as another texture rather than a focal point in themselves. The overall effect is that of a dreamscape that swallows the venue in its blissful embrace, while the disco ball on the ceiling refracts their soft light display into a thousand shimmering pieces.

DEAFHEAVEN set their bar high immediately with the blazing *Black Brick*, sounding for all the world like they just stepped out of Norway in the 90s. Even their usual melodic flourishes are gone as they deliver the frostiest blackened assault they can. The cheers that erupt on its conclusion are almost deafening, but are nothing compared to those for the following combination of *Irresistible* and *Sunbather*, the latter still sounding as groundbreaking as it did 10 years ago.

If the room was mostly sedate for Slow Crush, the energy Deafheaven erupt with is returned in full, with plenty of moshing and pits. George Clarke is a magnetic frontman, confidently striding across the stage while delivering his acerbic howls and soaring melodies as the set moves into more modern territories. It's testament to their quality that neither *In Blur* nor *Great Mass Of Color* are overshadowed and get just as enthusiastic a response – particularly the latter, as its grand explosion of post-rock-tinged shoegaze takes hold. It's an electrifying, mesmerising celebration of the many facets of a divisive, but utterly brilliant band and their fans who've stuck with them all these years.

WILL MARSHALL

ESCUELA GRIND

229, LONDON

"When I say poo poo, you say pee pee!" drummer Jesse Adan Fuentes commands early into Escuela Grind's first-ever UK headline show. You can call it immature (because it is), but it's also a perfect symbol for what they're out to do: turn the broadly self-serious grindcore scene right on its head. It's a campaign that's earned them high-profile admirers, including Napalm Death (whom Escuela supported in February/March) and Converge's Kurt Ballou, who produced last year's *Memory Theater* album. The band also bring tunes that span the extreme metal spectrum, from meat'n'potatoes grind to some as-yet-unreleased, pure-blooded death metal and one song that recreates the hook of Grandmaster Flash's *The Message* for a laugh. While Escuela play to far from the biggest crowd tonight, and technical issues abound, energy fills the room for the whole set, with moshpits and walls of death raging nonstop. Vocalist Katerina Economou later dedicates the set to the trans community and "girls, gays and theys" before ending the show with a Hatebreed cover. It's a reminder right before London limps home that Escuela are driven to push grindcore towards new territories, tones and audiences.

MATT MILLS

OBITUARY

PEST CONTROL / SWAMP COFFIN

02 ACADEMY 2, SHEFFIELD

Top marks to local-ish openers **SWAMP COFFIN** – not only for their smart 'Slowly We Rotherham' t-shirts but also for their crushing wave of sludge and a wonderfully ridiculous slow-motion wall of death. Leeds outfit **PEST CONTROL** veer the other way, with a full-throttle blast of crossover thrash delivered with maximum breathless energy. It's a great start, but thoughts of any other band are eclipsed as soon as **OBITUARY** riff machine Trevor Peres starts cranking out the extended instrumental intro of *Redneck Stomp*. The guitar tone has bones in it and heads are banging in unison, but it's when vocalist John Tardy appears and they launch into *Sentence Day* that the mayhem really begins. It feels like the death metal legends have brought the Floridian swamp with them, only made of sweat and dripping back down from the ceiling as the crowd circles and snaps. There's an understandable lean towards new album *Dying Of Everything*, but the likes of *Barely Alive* and the title track itself do fine snarling jobs, while *War* is apocalyptic live. They also delve into that immense back catalogue, and as *Slowly We Rot* provides the only possible conclusion, the veterans prove themselves once more the masters of their own brutal craft.

PAUL TRAVERS

MARIE KORNER

Red Method's not a band you really want to heckle

Red Method's *Back To The Future* re-enactment was a bit... distinctive

COALITION FEST

NEW CROSS INN, LONDON

Groove/death metallers Red Method lead a charge of the heavy brigade

IT'S SATURDAY NIGHT at Coalition Fest, the midpoint of an inaugural weekender organised by the London Metal Coalition, a community of more than 50 bands uniting the local scene. A cataclysmic set by **IMPERIUM** sets the tone, as they smash out rigorous thrash to a sea of flailing limbs. **WORSHIP THE SACRIFICE** bring their unique brand of frenetic death metal to the line-up. Despite being a mere two years into their career, this ambitious crew give it their all. The floor is a magnet for charismatic guitarist Steve Sharp, who weaves between revellers as he riffs note-perfectly, while Lazerus embodies the brutal commander, issuing impressive harsh vocals atop jagged riffs.

Buoying the trend for upcoming acts, Norwich band **COLLAPSE THE SKY**, winners of Bloodstock's Metal 2 The Masses 2022 contest, bring a show-stopping performance to the New Cross Inn. "London, get your hands in the air," bellows Lee Margaillan as guitarist Flynn Green, an artist in his own right, shreds with inspiring force during the epic, grinding pelt of *Dream Catcher*. Testament to the band's talent, a finale of *People = Shit* sounds as good as Slipknot's original.

It's almost 11pm when a rabble of paint-smeared noisemongers take the stage looking like they've just escaped from the Thunderdome. At **RED METHOD**'s helm, Jeremy Gomez displays the sort of stage presence that could only come from a seasoned frontman (in this case Ted Maul, This is Endless and Meta-Statis). "Open up to the fucking ends," he booms to an emerging circle-pit during *Messiah*. The throng – who have been at the venue all day – oblige, showing no signs of being on their last legs. Red Method bring a special kind of energy, one that can barely be contained by the sticky walls of this south London boozer. On one hand hellish and maniacal, on the other groove-laden and recalling the heady days of Slipknot, this band deliver their industrial thunder like pros. *My Psychosis* is a tumult of true heaviness, augmented by keyboardist Stefan Cass's theatrical gestures and, to his side, a masked Quinton Lucion furthering the band's carnival-in-hell aesthetic. As the end of their set nears, Red Method chose to elongate *Ideology Of The Sick* with some crouch-and-jump crowd participation. It's a well-trodden tactic, but this band are cool enough to pull it off – and cool enough to get rapturous applause as they wrap up the day.

HOLLY WRIGHT

BEN GIBSON

As Everything Unfolds: Charlie Rolfe sets her sights on metal's top tier

AS EVERYTHING UNFOLDS

LAKE MALICE

O2 ACADEMY ISLINGTON, LONDON

UK metalcore braves reveal their star power

IF YOU FED modern pop-metal into an AI and asked it to recreate that sound, you'd get **LAKE MALICE**. The Brighton-based duo are firm products of their time, channelling the melodic sensibilities of latter-day Bring Me The Horizon and the electro-punk bent of Wargasm. As they rally through *Creepers* and *Black Turbine*, it's impossible to think of anything unique they add to the UK scene around them. Nonetheless, singer Alice Guala is a more-than-capable frontperson, her calls for arm-waving and moshpits ensuring that Islington rarely stands still during their half-hour.

AS EVERYTHING UNFOLDS, on the other hand, feel poised for stardom. On their first European tour to promote both this year's *Ultraviolet* and their pandemic-afflicted debut, *Within Each Lies The Other*, the UK dates are near-sold-out. The title track of their newest album instantly broadcasts the manifesto that's brought the band this far this soon. On top of lead-heavy nu metal, singer Charlie Rolfe croons gorgeous melodies that take on a harder edge during the verses. It becomes especially impressive when she reveals she's suffering from laryngitis – a sickness that would have been mistaken for slight nerves had she not brought it up, and she performs admirably.

Tonight quickly becomes a no-filler torrent of one quickfire anthem after another. The electro-rock of *Blossom* slides as smoothly as butter into *Hiding From Myself* and its pop-metalcore, before *Grayscale* condenses the grandiose emotions of a ballad into tight-knit form. Because of this lightspeed song-dispensing, the show maintains its momentum for the entire hour. The circle-pit is always swirling, but the energy crescendos as the set comes to a close. *Twilight*, with its Korn-like guitar chugs, and the vivacious pop of *All I've Ever Known* end the main set with the crowd audibly begging for more. Then, *On The Inside* boasts a chorus so beloved that Charlie can pull the mic away and let the rapturous venue gleefully fill in the gaps.

Although it's a cliché to call a rising band "the next big thing", it's hard to picture a reality where *As Everything Unfolds* don't get massive. They've got the hooks and the energy – and, only two years from releasing their first album, there's already a diehard fanbase eager to carry them to metal's top rung.

MATT MILLS

FULL OF HELL

JARHEAD FERTILIZER / ANTICHRIST SIEGE MACHINE / UNYIELDING LOVE

EXCHANGE, BRISTOL

The Exchange is already sweltering as Belfast's **UNYIELDING LOVE** make an uncompromising racket, while **ANTICHRIST SIEGE MACHINE**'s black/death hybrid is as unsubtle as you'd expect. The duo's nefarious march and fiendish devilry goes down a storm. Featuring the headliners' rhythm section, **JARHEAD FERTILIZER** are an entirely different proposition, with *Product Of My Environment* and *Life Is A Prison* building an oppressive wall of noise backed by the bludgeoning rage of broken American inner-city life. After so much visceral hostility, the night's strangest experience comes in softly spoken Dylan Walker, who adds some much-needed humanity as he graciously addresses the crowd between his piercing vocals over **FULL OF HELL**'s scintillatingly, infernal grindcore. Fifteen songs slash and stab in a whirlwind 30 minutes of rhythmic intensity and Spencer Hazard's chaotic riffing. Another edge is added when things slow down and Dylan's electronic effects take over, and *Burning Apparition* finds a new way to peel skin. *Gnawed Flesh* descends into a desolate plane of foreboding feedback, with the opener's vocalist Richard Carson joining to add his pained screams in a harrowing but cathartic finale.

ADAM BRENNAN

SIGNS OF THE SWARM

MENTAL CRUELTY / HARBINGER

REBELLION, MANCHESTER

HARBINGER cram seven songs into their 30 minutes tonight, which bassist Kris Aarre puts down to "sweating, and no contingency plan if anything goes wrong". Luckily, the Londoners stampede through their set flawlessly. With *Guile*'s terrifying screams and *Prayer Of Deliverance*'s Earth-shattering riffs, they're an exemplary display of what an opening band should be. **MENTAL CRUELTY** are a potent cocktail of deathcore and black metal, and vocalist Lukas Nicolai snarls menacingly at the enraptured crowd throughout the whole set. Most of their setlist comes from this year's *Zwielicht*, but the crowd lap it up. *King Ov Fire* is the highlight tonight, as the venue erupts in appreciation. **SIGNS OF THE SWARM** are possibly the heaviest band you'll see in 2023. With a wall-to-wall pit spreading, the band display unrelenting, primal deathcore at its finest. On multiple occasions you'll find yourself grinning as David Simonich's guttural vocals shift around your internal organs. Each member is rabid, prowling the stage and glaring at the crowd as though they're meaty prey while *Death Whistle* closes the set in ferocious fashion.

CHERI FAULKNER

PHIL WALLIS

SUPERSONIC FESTIVAL 2023

7SVN, BIRMINGHAM

Midlands institution marks two decades of progression and diversity

NOW IN ITS 20th year, Supersonic Festival continues to be a celebration of the most experimental and progressive nooks of the alternative sphere, drawing as much from the worlds of electronica, noise and hip hop as it does from the metal world and beyond. In that spirit, **ASHENSPIRE** offer a sonorous black metal cacophony mixing violent blastbeats and wailing sax. Vocalist Alasdair Dunn rages against a world that's clearly gone wrong with so much venom you'd think he was narrating some distant dystopia if the lyrics weren't so damn relatable.

By contrast, North African punks **TAQBIR** are joyously liberating, blasting through a short-but-electrifying set of hyperactive noise. Even under a literal and figurative veil of anonymity, their message of inclusiveness shines through as they dedicate songs to "those who cannot be themselves", adding, "I accept your existence – you are valid." **DIVIDE AND DISSOLVE** couldn't be more different sonically. An ear-splitting racket delivered as though the band have pierced through to some eldritch void, guitarist Takiaya Reed is deceptively soft-spoken as she delivers short speeches on the band's themes of postcolonialism, slavery and genocide, adding a poignancy to their punishingly intense drone.

GODFLESH may have popped up everywhere from ArcTanGent to Damnation in recent years, but there's nothing quite like seeing the band in the same post-industrial space that spawned them some 35 years ago. Kicking off with *Nero* from this year's *Purge* album, the duo's offering is one of intense, abject industrial noise, imperious and almost transcendent in its bluster. *I, Me, Mine* sounds like somebody has fed 00s garage into the jaws of some colossal mechanical beast, while the crushing rhythms of *Land Lord* and *Streetcleaner* come on like the world's most malevolent metronome.

BACKXWASH's UK debut is an electrifying, cathartic experience. While the set begins with a sense of fury at a world that has rejected her, Ashanti Mutinta doubled over as she spits venomous verses during *Terror Packets, Into The Void* and *Devil In A Moshpit*, the mood steadily becomes one of personal revolution. Closer *Mukazi*'s lyric *'I wanna tell you that you made it alive',* heralds a sense of hopefulness that leaves members of the audience openly weeping. It's closure for an emotional journey that has seen Backxwash heralded as one of the finest examples of metal's evolution in recent years, and a perfect end to a day representing the sheer diversity of metal in 2023.

RICH HOBSON

Ashenspire dangle a dash of hope for our current dystopia

Divide And Dissolve seek out a drone of one's own

Godflesh: Justin Broadrick takes the hard road to transcendence

Backxwash leaves a trail of tears at Supersonic

BACKXWASH: PRESS/ALICE NEEDHAM. ASHENSPIRE, DIVIDE AND DISSOLVE, GODFLESH: PRESS/SNAPROCKANDPOP/JOE SINGH

Oxbow perfect the art of almost falling apart

OXBOW

STUDIO 9294, LONDON

San Francisco's mercurial avant-rockers liberate minds and clothing

THERE AREN'T MANY bands over three decades in who can gather a crowd as young as the metalheads and hipsters filling out this spacious east London venue tonight. But the utterly unique territory Oxbow have carved out since they lurched into view with 1989's *Fuckfest* album has proved so volatile, so lacking in any kind of mental safe haven, that every gig always carries with it an evergreen, knife-edge thrill. However far back the San Franciscan quartet reach into their history, their capricious sense of adventurism means you always know you're about to *embark*.

If their new album, *Love's Holiday*, has found Oxbow in more conciliatory mood, less white-hot fever dream than a set of restless, 2am ruminations, then the opening *Yoke*, torn from the debut album, is still a portal to a new world of sonic geometry. It's like being punched in the face by a film noir, and strewn with wasted, writhing riffs like a jazz band who've already been playing for the past 48 hours. Talismanic frontman Eugene S. Robinson wanders onto the stage to huge cheers, ears covered in customary duck tape, black shirt and trousers to be inevitably discarded, and for all his imposing presence, appears to be lost in his own internal labyrinth, piston-pumping his arms to any beat and his wheedling, alleycat-on-heat retch sounding like it's been stripped of several layers of psychic cushioning.

There is, of course, an uncommon level of method to Oxbow's madness, and the amount of telepathy and meticulous precision needed by the bandmembers to annotate Eugene's punchdrunk monologues is steeped in dramatic weight and tension. If at times they sound like blues rock reflected through a thousand shards of splintered glass, there's a deep, sensual awareness of groove running throughout that has half the audience dancing, not least the one punter throwing her arms up and stomping like a cheerleader from Hell.

Eugene may not beat down unruly punters these days, but his cheerful warning against people filming the entire set has every mobile phone held up suddenly disappear. Meanwhile, relatively accessible new songs like the off-kilter tumble and sudden diversions of *Dead Ahead* and *All Gone*'s emotionally flayed and frayed torch song find new ways to kick you in the gut. The closing classic *The Valley* is, once again, the sound of a mind unravelling into the most bewildering and enthralling of new forms.

JONATHAN SELZER

MUTOID MAN

SILVERBURN

OSLO, LONDON

Mutoid Man, formed by Cave In vocalist/guitarist Stephen Brodsky and Converge drummer Ben Koller, are a gloriously OTT celebration of heavy metal at its most ludicrous. Beforehand, we're treated to **SILVERBURN**, the new project from underground legend James 'Jimbob' Isaac, formerly of Hark and Taint, their tight, muscular riffing proving a fitting appetiser. Half the fun of a **MUTOID MAN** show is seeing the bandmembers revel in an air of frivolity that their main projects wouldn't allow. Stephen's alter ego is a grinning, gurning whirlwind of buffoonish energy, delivering absurd anthems such as *Melt Your Mind, Kiss Of Death* and *Date With The Devil* like some delectably mad metal scientist. That's not to say Mutoid Man can't switch on a dime, however, as they do mid-set with the stirring and epic *Bandages*. In the hands of less capable acts, this would be a jarring shift, but songs of this quality delivered with such a sense of high camp can't fail. Throughout, Stephen delightedly barks, "This is what a sold-out show looks like!" Going by how much fun the crowd have tonight, it will be the first of many.

REFMRY DEDMAN

RATOS DE PORÃO

229, LONDON

For fans of punk rock of a certain vintage, tonight is a massive deal. Twenty years since they last performed on British soil, Brazilian crossover icons Ratos De Porão are in the capital. The band are celebrating 40 years of active service, and they go about proving that age and advancing years are no obstacle to brutality, power or energy. Lead vocalist João Gordo rarely utters a word of English onstage when he addresses the crowd, but they still hang on his every syllable, cheering loudly at every shoutout. He may not move around as much as he did in the 80s, but he has a voice that threatens to strip paint from the venue's walls, nailing high, piercing shrieks, guttural roars and bullish punk barks. The band are equally adept, swerving brilliantly from old-school, d-beat punk rock to speed-of-light thrash, to crushing, chest-beating hardcore. The crowd know they're seeing something rare and special, charging around with wild abandon, jumping on the stage to grab the mic and singing along to classics like *Beber Até Morrer* and just generally providing the atmosphere so conducive to making this type of music work. Don't make us wait another 20 years, lads.

STEPHEN HILL

KEVIN NIXON

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FIVE MINUTES WITH

JESSICA PIMENTEL

BRUJERIA

The actor/Brujeria vocalist reflects on 'big brother' Peter Steele, licking Meshuggah's faces and the metal she listened to while filming *Orange Is The New Black*

WORDS: MATT MILLS

How did you join Brujeria?
"Monte Conner [at Nuclear Blast Records] introduced us many years ago. I'd been seeing Brujeria for many years, so I was already a fan. [Brujeria frontman Juan] Brujo had heard I was a singer in my other band, Alekhine's Gun, and thought we'd be a good mix. I had no rehearsal, just one soundcheck of two songs, then got thrown into the fire at my first show in New York City."

Having grown up in NYC, do you have any wild stories from the metal or hardcore scenes?
"The infamous Coney Island High School show of 1998 – anyone who was there will remember because they probably got pink-eye. It was completely over capacity: The Dillinger Escape Plan, Candiria and Meshuggah. It was so hot that everybody was sweating, the sweat created humidity and the humidity created rain, and the rain made everyone fall and bust their faces open. That's how I met Tomas [Haake, Meshuggah drummer and Jessica's partner]."

Sounds romantic.
"I think I licked him. Ha ha ha! Or it might have been Jens [Kidman, singer]. Everybody was so sweaty and so on-fire you just grabbed somebody and licked them! That's how everyone got pink-eye, or they got strep throat from grabbing the mic and passing it around."

How about hardcore shows?
"You had bands playing in attics and destroying people's homes. I went to a show in Rockaway Beach and there was nothing left, basically. The walls were no longer there. We helped our friends redecorate by throwing other people through walls. Ha ha ha!"

Did you ever get thrown through a wall?
"No, but I was a master of moshing with any type of chair or stool. I was a little smaller than most guys at the show and needed a little extra protection. I'd pick up a chair and dance around with it, and that's when you knew it was time for me to go!"

"PETER STEELE WAS A DEEP, SENSITIVE GUY"

Great for blocking crowd-killers, we imagine.
"And, if the song is boring, you have a place to sit. Ha ha ha!"

What about when you're onstage? What's the maddest show you've played so far?
"It was a festival in Mexico City, on Cinco de Mayo, with Brujeria. I remember meeting Gojira at the airport and finding out we'd be playing 20 minutes after they start, on a stage at the opposite end of the field. The second our [backdrop] comes up, the crowd starts running from Gojira's stage to ours. Joe [Duplantier, Gojira singer/guitarist] was like, 'What's going on?', then he sees me on the big screen opposite, and I point to Joe like [Jessica does the 'slit throat' hand gesture]. He was dying laughing while he was playing."

Do you have any more musical projects planned?
"With Alekhine's Gun, everyone's branched off into different projects at this point. I don't know if we'll get back together and do something else. I'm currently working with someone who I can't name yet, but he's the bass player in two of my favourite bands. He's doing a solo project and invited me to be a guest vocalist."

You knew Peter Steele when you were younger. What was he like?
"He was a very sensitive, deep guy. To me, he was a big brother-type person and talked me through a very hard time in my life. I was a lonely, depressed kid and I think he identified that. He made mixtapes for me and stuff. You might expect him to be a jerk or a womaniser but, if he was, I never saw that side of him."

You've said that, for the first three years of *Orange Is The New Black*, you were in tears every day of shooting. Did music help you during that emotional time?
"Music is one of my acting tools. It's how I tap into whatever emotion I need for a scene. Most of the time, it was a lot of metal and goth: a lot of Nick Cave, Zeal & Ardor, Meshuggah and Depeche Mode. But then afterwards I'd put on something completely fun: dance, Latin music, hip hop – whatever was the opposite. As I'm taking the wardrobe off, I'm putting the character away." H

BRUJERIA'S NEW ALBUM, *ESTO ES BRUJERIA*, IS OUT NOW VIA NUCLEAR BLAST

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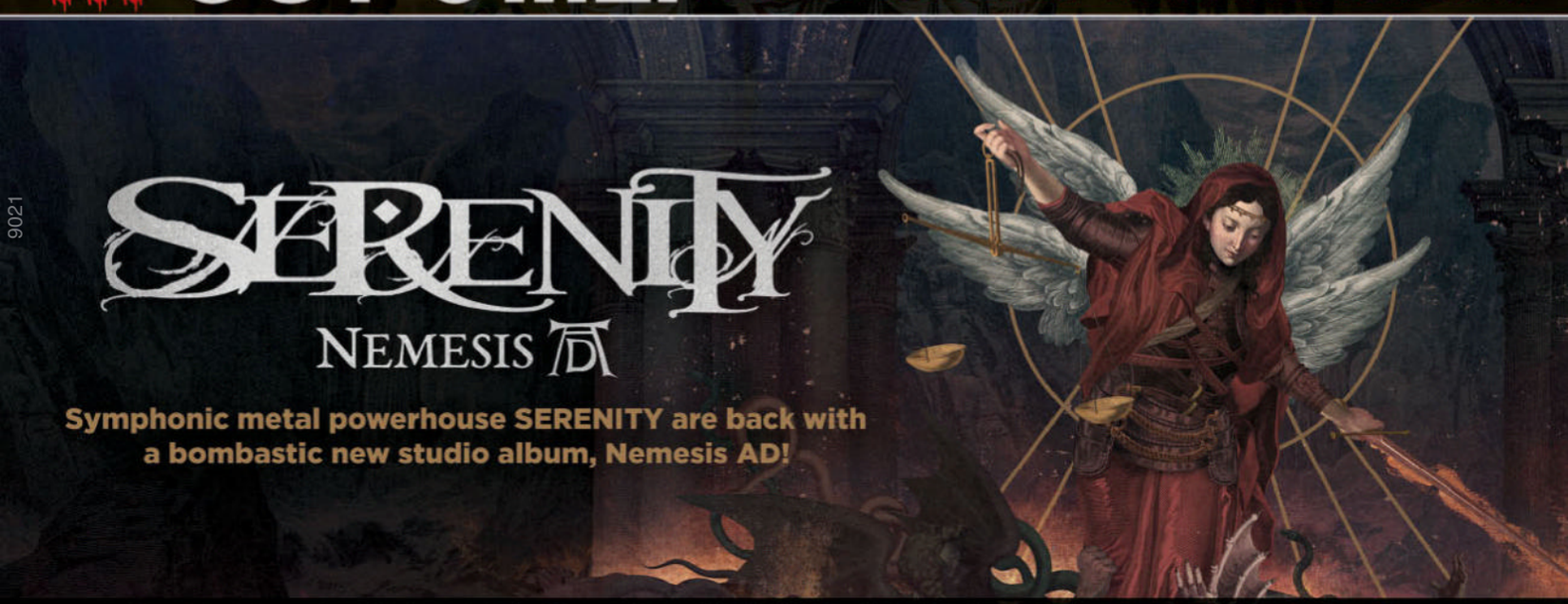

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